

THE RUMOUR

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THE RUMOUR

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

C. K. MUNRO

Stage Version



LONDON: 48 PALL MALL
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GLASGOW SYDNEY AUCKLAND

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I am indebted to Mr. W. S. Kennedy and to Miss H. M. Dallas for valued help in the preparation of this version of the play.

The two states referred to as Britain and France in this play are intended to typify any great modern states. No special reference is intended. Any states wealthy enough to finance enterprise in smaller states would have done as well. The play is a study in modern tendencies which are perfectly general.

THE following play should be staged as simply and symbolically as possible. Certain of the scenes are intended to be played before a drop curtain, the next scene meanwhile being set behind. There should be little or no interval except between the acts.

TABLE OF SCENES AND CHARACTERS

In the following table the scenes before a drop curtain are indicated by brackets. Characters are given in the order of their appearance.

PROLOGUE : Luke's house in London.

LUKE, interested in financial operations.

KITTY.

WALTER, interested in financial operations.

NED, a financier.

RUBY.

ACT I.

Scene I.—Lennard's office near the borders of Przimia.

CHARLES LENNARD, local representative of the Imperial Armament Association.

HON. ALGERNON MOODIE, British Attaché in Przimiprzak.

LA RUBIA, Representative of the Przimian Government.

Scene II.—[Newsboy's Beat, a London Street.]

NEWSBOY.

JONES } City clerks.
SMITH }

Scene III.—Cabaret in Przimiprzak.

JACKSON, British workman in Przimia.

ARAMYA, in charge of the bar.

KONCHAK
KAPRIKAN
POOSHPIN
LAMINOK
BURASTOK
CHEEKRAM

} Przimian workpeople.

PARO, a Lorian workman.

LENA JACKSON, Jackson's daughter.

Scene IV.—[Ned's office in London.]

NED.

ACT II.

Scene I.—Katya Soresti's house in Przimiprzak.

LORIAN PRIEST.

DEANE, British free-lance missionary.

TORINO, Lorian leader.

RANSKAYA, Lorian woman.

OLD SORESTI, Katya Soresti's father.

LENA JACKSON.

LORIANS.

Scene II.—[Suburb in London.]

JONES. SMITH.

Scene III.—Lennard's Office.

LENNARD. MOODIE. LA RUBIA.

Scene IV.—[Ned's Office.]

NED.

ACT III.

Scene I.—Prime Minister's Room.

THE RIGHT HON. GEORGE OVERTON, Prime Minister of England.

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.

PRIVATE SECRETARY TO PRIME MINISTER.

SIR ARTHUR CHESTON	} Members of Deputation of business men.
SIR GEORGE DARNELL	
SIR ROBERT MORTIMER	

OTHER MEMBERS OF DEPUTATION OF BUSINESS MEN.

DEANE.

MR. GRANGE, Leader of Labour Deputation.

OTHER MEMBERS OF LABOUR DEPUTATION.

Scene II.—[Newsboy's Beat.]

NEWSBOY.

JONES.

SMITH.

Scene III.—The Docks.

JONES.

HIS WIFE.

ACT IV.

Scene I.—Chancellor's Palace in Przimiprzak.

LA RUBIA.

THE HON. ALGERNON MOODIE.

M. RAFFANEL, Representative of France.
GENERAL MOBERLEY, General commanding
British troops in Przimia.
SECRETARIES, EXPERTS, ETC.
PHOTOGRAPHER AND ASSISTANTS.

Scene II.—[Newsboy's Beat.]

NEWSBOY.

JONES.

SMITH.

Scene III.—The docks.

CLERGYMAN.

SMITH.

Epilogue—Luke's house in London

WALTER.

LUKE.

NED.

KITTY.

RUBY.

PROLOGUE

Round a fireplace in a sumptuous flat in London. The fire has its back to the front of the stage and is only visible through the red glow it casts on the faces of those that sit round it. There are three or four very easy luxurious chairs round the fire, and among them a small low table upon which are liqueur glasses and bottles, materials for smoking, cigar boxes, etc. All the background is completely dark.

When the Curtain rises the scene is occupied by two people. LUKE, a dark obese individual running to flesh, with a long face, heavy cheeks and a big nose, of about forty; and a girl of about twenty-three, KITTY, of the most modern and sophisticated type, heavily made-up, and dressed in the most expensive clothes. Both smoke cigars.

Kitty: Yes, but look here, Luke, this is all very well, but before I come with you, so to speak permanently, I want to know something

of your finances, my boy. After all, I must know where I'm landing myself ; it's only right.

She flicks the ash from her cigar.

I mean, what are your prospects ?

Luke : Well, I should think with a man of my age, it's about time I had something more than prospects . . . and I doubt, Kitty, taking you all round, my dear, whether you're the girl to contemplate setting up house with a man who'd only got prospects——

Kitty : Yes, but you know what I mean. You may be all right now, without any chance of doing any better later on.

LUKE looks annoyed.

Luke, where *do* you get your money from ?

Luke : Well, as a matter of fact, I get it mostly from undertakings in Przimia.¹

Kitty : Undertakings ? What kind of undertakings ?

Luke : Oh, oil wells, mineral deposits, timber, transport and so on. It's the Przimian Development concern. We're all in it.

¹ Pronounced "Shimia "

Kitty : Ned and Walter ? Are they in it ?

Luke : Yes, we're all in it. Between us we hold a controlling interest in it.

Kitty : A controlling interest ? What's that ?

Luke : Fifty-one per cent of the share capital.

Kitty : And which of you's got most ?

Luke : Ned.

Kitty : Ned ? That little blighter ? Well, I'm damned !

Luke : Ned started the thing really—and then we came in with him. —

Kitty (*thoughtfully*) : I see. . . . What d'you call it ?

Luke : The Przimian Development Combine.

Kitty : Shimian ? What's Shimian ?

Luke : Przimia's a place.

Kitty : What kind of a place ?

Luke : Oh, it's a little country somewhere in the middle east of Europe. You must have heard of it.

Kitty : No, I'm damned if I have.

She says this in a tone that suggests she has much more important things to do than to hear of such places. This veiled belittling of his financial operations has the effect of changing LUKE'S attitude from passive submission to

*cross-examination, to an active desire to shine.
He rises.*

*Luke (going towards the vague background):
Here, Ned's got a map of it somewhere here.*

He hunts about in the gloom, while KITTY remains passively smoking with a rather superior air, and presently with a squeaking of castors over the thick carpet produces a large-scale map of Przimia and Loria stretched vertically on a stand. He switches on an electric light attached to the stand which brilliantly illuminates the map. Przimia and Loria are marked in bold lettering and differently coloured. Przimia is full of names of towns, mines, factories, power stations, and of railways, roads, etc.; while Loria is bare of these things. Both are mountainous in parts, but especially Loria. Besides the main boundary between them is another dotted line partly congruent with this one and partly going through Przimian territory, indicating that if this were the boundary, Przimia would be smaller and Loria larger.

Luke (adjusting the map): There you are, my dear. That's Przimia.

Kitty (surveying it with a condescending eye) : H'm ! . . . So that's where your money comes from, is it ? What a funny way to spell it——

Luke (with some pride) : It is, my dear. That's where it comes from. That's our little territory. We own that place, we three here, so you may say—and very nice too !

Kitty : And what about that one over there—*(she points with her cigar)*—that one to the right—aren't there any mines and things in that too ?

Luke : What, here ? In Loria ? Oh, God, yes—any amount of oil, copper and so on.

Kitty : Well, why don't you own that too ?

She says this in a tone that suggests that she would, if she were one of them.

Luke : The people, my dear. The labour ! They're perfectly hopeless.

Kitty : What's wrong with them ?

Luke : They won't work.

Kitty : Lazy blighters. . . . Can't you make 'em ?

Luke (speaking with resentment) : No—that's just the bl—— excuse me——part of it. We can't *(waxing enthusiastic on a favourite theme.)* I'm a broad-minded man myself, and I'm all for

self-determination—no one more so. But I ask you, is it right that a set of dirty lousy people—a filthy people they're said to be—should sit down on one of the most developable pieces of God's earth, and prevent any capital being sunk in it.

Kitty (calmly, as though slightly deprecating such enthusiasm on such a topic): Can't you get the government to do anything?

Luke: The government! My God, d'you know——

Kitty (seeing fresh enthusiasm ahead, in the most calm indolent manner, blowing smoke): What's that dotted line there?

Luke (his enthusiasm pricked): That's the old boundary. You see, fifty years ago there was a war between these people, the Lorians and the Przimians, and the Przimians won, and all this piece here was taken off the Lorians and added to Przimia.

He points to the space between the dotted line and the present boundary.

That was at the peace of Rymania; it was after that that all the development began.

Kitty (after a moment, still as though on the verge

of boredom) : I see. . . . Why don't you get up another war ; then you could take some more off those blighters on the right and add it to the other lot ?

Pause. LUKE looks a little confused. Voices are heard, and enter behind RUBY, WALTER and NED. WALTER is a large, loud, burly person of forty ; NED a little grim-faced, piercing-eyed person of fifty ; and RUBY a person of KITTY's type, but sixteen years older, and consequently stouter. In spite of this she is dressed exactly in the same style as KITTY is. She is more obviously vulgar, but of a much softer manner.

Walter (even before they are distinctly seen) : Ha ! You dirty dog ! . . . There they are, the cooing doves ! Don't they look loving ! (Advancing towards the drinks.) Good God ! What are you doing with the map !

Kitty : I was asking Luke about where he gets his money from.

Loud laughter.

Walter (in high spirits) : Well, did he tell you

about the Lorians? Set of dirty dogs, the Lorians, Kitty, and no mistake.

Kitty : Yes, I think you're a set of fools. Why can't they be made to work? Can't you make them, Ned?

Ned (who has sat down in the middle) : Perhaps——

Kitty : Can't you get the government to do it?

Walter (going into loud half-comic anger) : Pah ! The government ! Do you know, Kitty—perhaps Luke didn't tell you this—(*he looks at LUKE who appears embarrassed*)—that so far from getting the government to make them work, we can't even get the government to see that we have proper protection against an attack from them.

Kitty : An attack from them, how d'you mean?

Walter (pointing at the map) : Fifty years ago, after the treaty of Rymania this piece here was taken off them. They've never forgiven that. And they're a barbarous savage crowd always threatening to make an attack in revenge. Now in a situation like that you'd think the British Government would see that British capital had proper protection, wouldn't you? But they won't. You'd think they'd force these damned

lazy Przimians to see that their place was properly guarded, wouldn't you? But not they—says Przimia's an independent state—must respect its independence and all that rubbish. Independent if you please! As if any one could have more interest in it than we have!

Kitty: And what would happen if they made an attack?

Walter (with finality): They'd smash the whole place up, and we'd lose every cent of capital we've got out there.

Kitty: I see. You mean Luke'd lose all his money.

LUKE looks uncomfortable.

Walter: Yes, and his Kitty too, I reckon!

Loud laughter.

Walter (with sudden change from boisterous merry to eager serious characteristic of him): No, but it's a damned shame. It's a damned shame and no mistake. . . . But Ned's got a plan'll do the trick I reckon. Eh, Ned? (*He looks round at the other man.*) Shall we tell them? . . . Shall we?

Ruby : Yes, come on, Walter ! Tell us !

Walter : A rumour ! . . . A rumour must be started that the Lorians *really are* coming on a certain date—a circumstantial rumour with details complete ! Ha ! Ha ! That'll do the trick.

Kitty : And what's the good of that ?

Ned (after a moment leaning forward, and speaking slowly with a note of seriousness and a force not hitherto heard) : It'll give 'em a fright. It'll give the government of this country a shaking up. They'll let us look after ourselves so long as they can. So long as they can draw money out of us they don't care. But you get them to believe that one fine day the Lorians *really are* coming—and that all that they make out of us by way of excess duties, import dues, and all the thousand and one other ways they have of pinching—all they take off us to pay unemployment doles to lazy loafers that they're afraid of—you push it into their thick heads that that'll be gone, if they don't look out, and you'll soon see the difference. Besides they daren't stand aside, because of the effect in the City——

Walter : Oh, it's a great scheme !

Slight pause.

Kitty : And how d'you start a rumour like that ?

Walter : Oh, that's easy enough. That's dead easy. We've got Moodie of the Legation in Przimia coming to lunch with us next Thursday. We'll send the Honourable Algernon away so quaking with fear of an attack that he won't know where he is. You see if we don't.

Ned : Yes, and quaking with something else—ambition. He'll see a chance to shine, to advance himself by knowing something before any one else does.

Ruby : Something that isn't there, eh ?

Ned : Oh, that doesn't matter. He won't know that and he'll spread the tale all the same.

Kitty : Well, I hope for Luke's sake your rumour comes off——

Slightly awkward pause.

Walter (suddenly becoming boisterous) : Well, never mind, come and have a drink. Come and have a drink to the success of the rumour !

He dashes about pouring out drinks and handing them.

Come on, you gloomy old dog Ned, drink !

THE RUMOUR

Come on, drink to the success of the rumour, coupled with the name of Luke, and to the confoundation of all dirty dogs like the Lorians. Come on, boys—you're not drinking !

Glasses raised, roars of laughter.

CURTAIN.

ACT I

SCENE I

The office of CHARLES LENNARD, one of the Directors of the Imperial Armament Association and in particular charge of its affairs in the region not far from the centre of Europe which is occupied by a number of small nations. His office is in a capital city outside all of these states, but near to all of them. CHARLES LENNARD is an urbane, polite old gentleman, with white hair and beard. He sits at a table desk. On the other side of the desk is the HONOURABLE ALGERNON MOODIE, a young British diplomat at present attached to the Przimian Legation. When the curtain rises MR. MOODIE has just said something to MR. LENNARD intended to be of great import. His head is bent forward, and he looks hard at MR. LENNARD. The latter, however, does not appear greatly impressed. There is a pause while MR. MOODIE allows the import of his statement to sink in.

Moodie : Well, now, you may believe me or not, but that was the answer I got. . . . When I was in London, naturally I saw the chaps controlling the oil and transport combines out here, and I put it to them—I asked them whether they weren't a bit nervous about the Lorians, and they said—(*with emphasis*)—*they'd expected an attack for some time, and were surprised it hadn't come earlier*. . . Very well. I come straight back to Przimiprzak¹ and find everything in a flutter over this report. . . . Well, there's one thing absolutely essential, and that's firm handling. It's necessary to act at once, for if we don't, the French undoubtedly will, and so increase their prestige in these parts at our expense. . . . Of course you'll understand that all this is strictly between ourselves, Lennard.

Lennard : Oh, quite.

Moodie : . . . Well, I lost no time. The creation of atmosphere is very essential on these occasions, and I've taken steps to create the kind of atmosphere I want. I've had notices posted to the managers of *every* British run factory in Simia, warning them to be ready for emergencies, and I've had a notice sent to every British subject in Simia, warning them, and suggesting that if

¹ Pronounced "Shimishake"

possible they should send their families into the Western provinces. Of course that's bluff because most of the people couldn't send their families into the Western provinces. But, they'll talk about it, and it'll get round, and there are a good many Lorians, as you know, working in Przimiprzak—and they'll carry the rumour over to Loria ; and it'll give the impression it's meant to give, that we're ready for them. . . Well, now, there we're up against the difficulty, because unfortunately, as you know—(*sinking his voice*)—we're not a bit ready for them, because these damned Simians will not understand the danger. . . . They haven't any guts. I've never seen such a set of peace-loving, lazy loafers. Why, they run away at the very sight of a gun. Now what am I to do with a people like that ? I've got to see that the place isn't blown to pieces, and I've no direct means of protecting it. Now that's why I'm here. Well now, excuse my frankness in speaking of it, but as regards the orders which you are executing for the Lorian Government in the way of munitions, etc., while I know that I cannot ask you to disclose their extent—if this report is true, and judging by my experience in these matters, which is pretty considerable, I am confident it is—

then there is no doubt that they must be immense. . . .

He says this with a solemn air of tremendous importance. LENNARD remains immovable.

Immense. . . . If the Lorians are preparing a coup, they cannot do it without munitions, and we know where all these states get their supplies from. . . .

Lennard (still not moving, speaking rapidly and abruptly in contrast to MOODIE's solemn utterance) : Moodie, I will be frank with you. Personally at this moment I am not aware what supplies we are sending through to the Lorian Government. But if you say they are immense, I will take your word for it

Moodie : You can.

Slight pause.

Now, Lennard, I want to put it to you. Do you realise that every ounce of that stuff is destined to blow British property sky-high? Within a very short space, if we don't act quickly, that stuff will be destroying British property in a way that is appalling to think of. . . . Now in those

circumstances I ask you whether it wouldn't be possible to divert some of it. . . . I'm quite aware that that would be an unusual, let us say even, an undiplomatic course. But sometimes the undiplomatic is the most diplomatic course ; and if by one and the same stroke we can deprive the Lorians of more munitions than are good for them and strengthen the Przimians, I think we could quickly normalise the situation. . . .

Lennard : You say, divert some of the supply going through to the Lorians—divert it ? Where to ?

Moodie : To Simia.

Lennard : But the Przimians don't want it—they haven't asked for it.

Moodie : No—they haven't. But suppose they did.

Lennard (righteously taken aback) : But, Moodie, I couldn't sanction such a transaction. What sort of a person do you think I am ?

Moodie : Lennard, this isn't an ordinary occasion. The Lorians want this stuff to make an attack on the Simians to get back some of the area taken from them under the Treaty of Rymania, fifty years ago—land in which millions of British capital would be lost if this thing were to happen. I mean it's not merely

a matter of business, but of vital *British* prestige.

Lennard : Possibly. But we have our prestige too. What's to compensate us for the loss of that, if we did this ?

Moodie : Well, of course, the Governments concerned. . . .

Lennard : Moodie, I don't blame you. But you'll excuse me. . . . I've heard Government representatives say that before. What would the Governments be prepared to do ?

Moodie : Well, that's a matter that would have to be arranged in conference with La Rubia, and that's why I asked him to come here to-day. I mean, if we're prepared to do what we can to help him to defend his damned little country, I think the least he can do is to pay for it. After all——

Lennard : No, Moodie, no. We couldn't think of it. You may do these things in politics, but this is business. In business we have to be honest.

Moodie : But, Lennard, consider the circumstances. . . .

Lennard : The circumstances are political, and as such are outside my sphere. We'll take on contracts and sell La Rubia as much stuff as he

wants, as quickly as we can. But we cannot break faith with others to do it.

Moodie : Even when those others will use your stuff as the enemies of Britain.

Lennard : In my official capacity, Moodie, I tell you I've nothing to do with Britain.

The door opens and the secretary announces that MR. LA RUBIA is outside. He has hardly said this when MR. LA RUBIA himself walks energetically in, as in a great hurry. A short, thick-set, important-looking little man in a frock coat, with gray hair sticking up all over his head.

La Rubia : Good-morning, gentlemen. You'll excuse my rapid entry, but I've very little time. However, you wanted to see me, and here I am !

The Others : Good-morning.

Courtesies are exchanged, and they settle down.

Moodie : Well, La Rubia, it's very good of you to have come all this way.

La Rubia : Not at all, not at all. I've no dignity, I don't believe in it. But I haven't

much time either, so may we get on, if you please.

Moodie : Quite. . . . Well now, La Rubia, we have discussed this before, but not so definitely. But the time has now come when we must act. Even now it may be too late. . . . All I want to do, La Rubia, is, with all the earnestness I can, to repeat the warnings I have given you in a friendly way before. You'll be blown sky-high inside a month if you're not careful. If you care to take the opportunity of retaliating that I'm trying to persuade Mr. Lennard here to afford you, well and good, if not, it's nothing to me. But you must realise from the latest developments that the warnings——

La Rubia (after a moment, suddenly appearing excited) : That's all you had to say to me? That's all you have brought me here to tell me? (*Rising.*) Well, thank you, gentlemen, I have no more to say except that I have a little honesty left and a little thought for the honour of my country. I do not believe you, Mr. Moodie. You did not bring me here for the reasons you suggest, but because you are in league with Mr. Lennard there, though you pose as the representative of the British Government. Mr. Lennard is a smart business man. Mr. Lennard wants to sell

his company's armaments, so he persuades the representative of the British Government to use his political influence to make me buy from him, by telling me of imaginary dangers that are supposed to beset me. Well, Mr. Lennard, all I can say is that I don't think it's in the best taste ; and you may have been able to lead the Honourable Mr. Moodie astray, but you won't be able to do the same with me. Good-morning, gentlemen.

He stands a moment, and then turns to go, but is checked by LENNARD'S voice.

Lennard (mildly) : I think perhaps, La Rubia, that before talking like that you should be careful to see that your remarks are founded on a basis of fact—at any rate that is what we do in business ; and speaking as a business man, if I replied to the insults you have just levelled at me by instructing my people to see that you weren't supplied with one ounce of material—beyond that already contracted for—during the next five years, I should be well justified. You flatter yourself if you think I have been laying plots to get money out of you. There isn't enough in you—at least that belongs to you—to make much

difference to people like us. I have no particular desire to sell you anything. On the contrary, Mr. Moodie here has just been pleading on your behalf for facilities that I have refused to give. So that your remarks amount to an insult to me and another to Mr. Moodie.

La Rubia (after a moment) : Mr. Lennard, I beg your pardon. What I said may have been wrong. There is another explanation. Mr. Moodie, I do not beg yours. If you do not represent Mr. Lennard here, then you represent the capitalists of Britain, though you say you represent its Government. Your goods are locked up in my safe, and you want me to spend time and money in taking needless precautions to protect them, because those you represent are foolishly nervous. You——

Moodie (still superior) : Mr. La Rubia, all this is completely irrelevant. The only thing that matters is that the Lorians will blow you sky-high inside one month. Do you want to be blown sky-high? If you do, well and good. I stand aside. If not, I'm trying to help you to avoid it. No one, I should have thought, could have a greater interest in that than you yourself.

La Rubia : Mr. Moodie, a slave has one kind

of interest in his own body, and his master has another. The people you represent have a *master's* interest in us ; they want to conserve us so that they can grow fat on us. And they want to dictate our policy down to the last detail not in our own interests, but in theirs, to make us act so that they will become fat and rich as quick and remain fat and rich as long as possible. There now, that's plain speaking, but it's a fact and you know it's a fact. We're not at the diplomatic table now, so we can speak our minds and I propose to speak mine. You may be our masters, but let us be quite frank about it, so that we may know where we are !

Moodie (after a moment, soothingly) : Quite, quite, La Rubia. I know you have that idea. You've explained it to me quite often. But that is not the point. The point now is that you will get blown sky-high inside a month unless you take some action, and I have been trying to fix up with Lennard here an arrangement that would prevent it.

La Rubia : For which we are to pay.

Moodie : Well, that is another matter. We haven't got that far.

La Rubia : You haven't got that far ? Oh, well, if you'll pay for it, that's another matter.

. . . But no, Mr. Moodie, you know very well it isn't intended that you should pay for it.

Moodie : I said we hadn't got that far.

La Rubia (with rising vehemence) : Moodie, you're a very clever young man with ideas. But I was at this game when you were at Eton. We shall not get blown to blazes, as you call it, because you will see that we're not. This game is quite a simple one, though difficult. You want something down, and you want to get us to pay for it. Well, you can pay yourself, that's all. Our policy is quite different—my policy. My policy is not to pile up armaments, but to keep the peace by reasonable means, by avoiding conflict and the cause for it. That's good enough for us. (*He rises.*) If it isn't for you, you must do the rest yourselves. I have no more time to discuss it. I bid you a very good day, gentlemen. (*He goes towards the door.*)

Moodie : La Rubia ! La Rubia !

Exit MR. LA RUBIA.

Damn ! I handled him wrong, I thought I could frighten him. I only annoyed him. . . . Damn ! . . . I said they were a faint-hearted crowd, these Simians. They haven't the guts of a louse. . . .

And, as sure as fate, if the Lorians get that stuff there'll be a row. Lennard, can't you divert some of it?

Lennard (quite composed): Were you at Eton?

Moodie: Yes. Why?

Lennard: I was wondering where you learnt your diplomatic technique.

Moodie: Oh, well, I've been at it all my life, more or less. You see, my gov'nor was Councillor to the Embassy at Lima. And then I was private secretary to Lord Tremaine for a bit—he's my uncle by marriage. However . . . I hate force but what is one to do. . . . I'm afraid we'll have to use it. Good-morning, Lennard.

Lennard: Good-morning.

Exit MOODIE.

LENNARD sits down again, sits quite still for a second or two. Then he turns to a telephone on the desk, and pressing one of a series of buttons connected with it, takes off the receiver.

Lennard (speaking down the 'phone with deliberation and precision): What consignments are going through to the Lorian Government at present? . . . None. Thank you.

THE RUMOUR

*He puts down the receiver and turning away
busies himself with some papers before him.
Pause.*

CURTAIN.

ACT I

SCENE II

The curtain which descended on the last scene leaves a shallow space representing a street or road in Greater London. Enter from L. the Newsboy. He is in a way a lonely individual, and has invented a thousand ways of diverting himself while driving his trade. He whistles, sings, throws coins in the air, and catches them, and acts all kinds of imaginings without the slightest relation to the kind of tidings he happens to be bearing to the world at large. He has a common measure for all kinds of news—its effect on trade. To-night his placards bear the legends, “Bad news from Przimiprzak,” and “Rumoured attack by Lorians,” and he keeps shouting in a hoarse high voice, “Bad news from Perzimmy,” and “Attack by ‘Oriens.”

When the Newsboy has arrived at about the centre of the stage, enter from the right two city

clerks—JONES and SMITH, both over forty, SMITH being decidedly the elder. They each carry black bags.

Jones : Ah, here's Jimmy.

JIMMY dashes up and offers paper.

Jimmy (with piquant familiarity) : Terrible news from Perzimmy, sir ! (*He winks.*)

Jones : Never mind about Perzimmy—what I want to know is if there's anything about cucumbers.

Jimmy (passing on) : Thank you, sir !

He passes out to the right, crying his placards as he goes.

Jones (scanning the paper, while Smith, who has put down his bag, gets out his pipe and busies himself with it) : With the help of my son, Joe, I'm enlarging my cucumber frames. Cost me twelve pounds, it will, but you can't grow cucumbers in a small frame, I've tried it, and it's no good.

Smith (getting his pipe well alight) : No. You're right there. . . . They won't grow in a small frame.

Jones (scanning the paper) : . . . And they often have useful bits here about gardening. Very useful I've found them sometimes. You know—just hints.

Smith : There's a man in our office, lives up at Highgate, and he——

They go out, SMITH puffing his pipe. News-boy returns, still carrying his placards and shouting, from right and crosses to left, and goes out.

ACT I

SCENE III

The black cloth to the previous scene rises on a scene representing a cabaret in the poorer quarter of Przimiprzak. At one side is a rough counter with a woman behind it—and many bottles, glasses, jugs, etc., round her. Along the back wall is a bench, on which sit some men drinking; others stand about. Among them a prominent figure is a burly Englishman named JACKSON—noticeable by his size and by his dress, which is somewhat different from that of the others. In particular he wears an old bowler hat on the back of his head.

Jackson : True? That's God's truth. You can take it from me. (*He feels in his pocket and produces a paper.*) Here's the paper. It says we're to be ready for "any eventuality, and it would be advisable if we could send our families into Western Przimia." There—you can read

it for yourselves—it's written in Przimian as well as English. Now then, that's official, that is. That comes straight from the British Legation in Arakhova Street—signed by Moodie, Esq., who's the boss up there. . . . And another thing I'll tell you——

Aramya (behind the counter, while she busily polishes glasses, and the others examine the paper) : God send it's true. The dirty lot of vermin. We've taught 'em once, and we'll teach 'em again.

Jackson : And another thing I'll tell you. There's not an English-owned mill in this town—at any rate in the oil business—that isn't getting rid of its stocks as fast as it can. Selling 'em off, or if they can't do that, the Transport Company's shipping them away as fast as they can.

Konchak (one of the others, reading) : “. . . into Western Przimia.” Where do they want them to go then ?

Pooshpin (a quaint little man, sitting at a table by himself) : But sure they won't start no war now with the crops not yet gathered.

Aramya : Go on with you, Pooshpin. You've no blood in you. My God, if one of these lousy vermin tried to touch me, I'd scratch his eyes out.

Do you know, in the last war they stripped three women naked and drove them into the Majadalla Lake. And Pooshpin talks about his crops !

Konchak : Ay, they did worse than that. Look at what they did down in Leminoro. They took two women and burnt them alive, so they say.

Pooshpin : Well, Aramya, I live right near the border, right in the road. If they come, what do you stand to lose ?

Aramya : What do I stand to lose ? It's the women always lose, it strikes me.

Jackson (facetiously) : You've nothing to lose old girl. You lost it long ago !

Aramya : What do you mean ?

Jackson : Never mind what I mean.

Aramya : Well, don't you try to insult me, or you'll find yourself outside. And as for Pooshpin, the dirty little hunchback, he lost nothing in the last war. If he'd suffered——

Pooshpin : Excuse me, Aramya, my family——

Aramya (fiercely) : Ah, shut up, will you ?

Konchak (to another in a low voice) : Aramya's a nice one to talk !

Aramya (turning on him) : What did you say ?

Konchak : Nothing——never mind, Aramya.
(*He laughs.*)

Aramya (threateningly) : What did you say ?

Laminok : He said you were a nice-looking girl, Aramya.

Aramya : You're a liar. He said nothing of the sort. He said I was a nice one to talk—yes, you did. What d'you mean ?

Konchak (annoyed, meaningly) : You know what I mean. I mean your grandmother was a Lorian, and you know it.

Aramya (momentarily put out) : Oh . . . my grandmother was a Lorian, was she ? . . . You're a dirty liar, then——

KONCHAK *laughs*.

My grandmother was not a Lorian. My grandmother came from Kephinoro, because her father went there from Riminak two years before she was born. She was a Riminak Przimian, so you keep your dirty lies to yourself.

A rather incredulous, amused silence.

Talk to Jackson, if you like. We all know his daughter's carryin' on with one of those vermin, and has been for months. So it serves him about right to have that bit of paper served on him.

Enter BURASTOK—a more shabbily dressed individual than the rest, but belonging to a richer class.

Burastok : Have you heard ?

Jackson (*gruffly, pointing to his paper that is being passed round*) : Yes, we've heard.

Burastok : Ah ! Smith, as boards with us, had one of those. They're coming all right—thirty-five thousand of them, so they say, over by the Majadalla Lake.

Jackson : You're wrong, mate. You don't know what you're talking about. Over by the Majadalla Lake, no fear, not this time of year.

Kaprikan (*an older man than the rest, handing back the paper after examining it*) : Well, I helped to whack them once, and I hope I'll live to see them whacked again.

Burastok : Well, there are thirty-five thousand of them coming over next Thursday week, that's the news down in our parts.

Kaprikan : No, not thirty-five thousand.

Burastok : Thirty-five thousand. My brother told me that, and he's in the post office.

Kaprikan : Did you serve fifty years back ?

Burastok : Fifty years back ! I wasn't born fifty years back !

Kaprikan : Well, I did, see ? So I ought to know, because I know you couldn't move thirty-five thousand men with baggage and equipment and guns with sufficient speed.

He drinks with finality. Enter CHEEKRAM, an aggressive-looking man.

Jackson : Well, what I want to know is, why have I got to send my family off into the Western Provinces ? I can't do it ! It's no good asking me to do it, because I can't do it, even if a set of lousy, dirty——

Cheekram : So you've had the ticket, have you ? Well, mates, here's a nice business. Up at our factory there they are bolting up the whole place, strengthening doors, barring windows, putting up barb-wire, and God knows what all.

Pooshpin : But what I want to know is, why should they want to come ?

Cheekram : Why should they want to ? Because they're a dirty lot of jealous mongrels. We've smashed 'em once and they can't forget it. Oh, don't you make any mistake. I've told you often enough before, only you wouldn't believe me. They've only been waiting till they could get

over what we gave 'em last time, the dirty lot of——

Kaprikan : Last time they came, I was only a lad, but I lived right in the road, so I know what it's like. Pooshpin's people weren't there in those days. They came from the south years after, and took the farm left vacant when the Hobililiak family died out—so he doesn't know. But I know. My home was in Orya, just at the top of the Atura Valley, like Pooshpin's there is at the end of the Krobijak. Pooshpin knows it——

Pooshpin : Ay, I have a daughter married a man from Orya.

Kaprikan : Well, it was up that valley to Orya they came—and they didn't give us any warning. At ten o'clock in the morning I was taking the men out their dinner, and at three o'clock in the afternoon when I should have been going out to the cattle, I was fifteen miles from my home, and it was burnt to the ground, and my father and oldest brother dead, and not a head of wheat left standing or a head of cattle for miles round. Those are the kind of boys you have to deal with. They drove every one they didn't kill, women and children and every one, in front of them and they put shame on our

country and laughed at us. . . . They didn't know that our General Rudine——

General murmur of admiration as for a traditional hero.

They didn't know he had gone up the Krobijak Valley and was going to cut them off in their rear. (*Pause.*) Boys, we didn't half make them pay for what they did to us !

Burastok : Ay, we chased 'em once and we'll chase 'em again. You wait !

Aramya : Ah, you men ! You sit here talkin', what are you going to *do* about it ?

Cheekram : Yes. You wait ! . . . We've waited. We've waited fifty years, and watched the lousy set of vermin that we'd chased into their holes in the mountains come in here and pinch our jobs, and then clear back again to their own country with the wages we should have had in their pockets, and make room for a fresh lot. We've a pack of the lousy devils in this town now, you know it as well as I do. The same fellahs as violated your womenfolk and threw them into the Majadalla Lake and burnt them alive, they're the lot we're letting come in and pinch our jobs because our bloody employers can get them cheap

—the lot we're workin' with, and marryin' with, and living with. And now we're going to let them come over the hills and murder the lot of us ! You know it's true, every word I say.

Growls.

What do you think of it, lads ? Is it fair, I say ? (*Scornfully.*) You wait ! I wouldn't wait. I'd take every one of the dirty vermin and string them up—teach the rest what they'd get if they came walking in here.

Sudden applause—and “ Hear ! Hear ! ”

Here's one of 'em now !

PARO, a young Lorian, has entered, unconscious of the topic of conversation. He is very dark and rather taller than most of the Przimians, but only about twenty years of age.

Yes, you, I mean ! You and a lot of dirty ticks like you, comin' murderin' us in our beds, like as not next week—(*turning to the others*)—and he walks in here as cool as a cucumber askin' for a drink. . . . Well, can you beat it ! Here we are

barrin' up doors and windows to prevent a lot of his lousy countrymen from kickin' up hell in our country, murderin' our men and rapin' our women, and here we let him come walkin' in askin' for booze ! Booze ! You won't get no booze here if Aramya has any sense.

Jackson (half rising and going towards the door) : Yes, and talking about that—— (*He disappears.*)

Paro (uneasily) : What's wrong with Cheekram ? Has he had too much, or something ?

Cheekram : There's nothing the matter with me.

Aramya : No, you're not going to get anything, so you needn't think it. And if you don't get out of here damn quick, I'll get some of the fellows to heave you out. Coming here asking for drink, when you'll be sticking a bayonet up me, like as not, next week !

Pooshpin (going up to PARO, in a low voice) : Look here, I'd clear out, if I was you. There'll be trouble if you stay. You'd best go home and keep quiet a bit.

JACKSON has returned, leading his daughter by the arm, a pleasant-looking girl of eighteen or twenty.

Jackson : And don't let me see you skippin' with that lousy jackanapes no more. See ? . . . I guessed I'd find her outside waiting for you, mister. Well, if I see you again after her, I'll thrash the life out of you, see ?

Paro : Steady on, Jackson, old man. You don't know what you're talking about.

Lena (his daughter) : Of course he doesn't, the drunken beast !

Jackson : You come with me, will you.

JACKSON, still muttering angrily, catches his daughter's arm and pulls her towards the door. PARO goes after them. CHEEKRAM gets in his way.

Lena : Let me go ! You're drunk, you swine !

She struggles frantically while her father hauls her away.

Cheekram (to PARO) : You stay where you are.

Paro : Who do you think you're talking to ?

Cheekram : I know who I'm talking to.

Paro : Well, get out of the way, then.

He tries to pass. CHEEKRAM pushes him back.

Cheekram : I'm talking to a bloody spy !
That's who I'm talking to——

PARO hits him in the face, and a fierce struggle begins. The crowd closes round the combatants.

Aramya (coming from behind the counter) : Come on, out of it ! Here, you fellows——

Led by ARAMYA, they all attack PARO, and the struggling mass sways towards the door, and finally disappears through it. Outside, the mêlée continues, and grows suddenly more considerable, judging by the sounds, as though the sides had become more evenly matched. Gradually it dies away somewhat in the distance. Suddenly three shots are heard in the distance, then the distant shouting of a crowd. The squalid, untidy cabaret is left deserted.

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT I

SCENE IV

NED's office, which can be symbolically represented by a space in front of a dark curtain. NED is standing thoughtfully when curtain rises. A moment later enter a shorthand writer through the dark curtain, who sits on a chair.

Ned (dictating each word separately, as if weighing them as he spoke them): "News from Przimia all bluff, but opportunity to be rid of outsiders. Sell at once openly to start panic, and when they're on the run buy them all up through agent." Thank you. Immediately please. In code.

Exit SHORTHAND WRITER.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE I

A month later. An upper room in a house in a suburb of Przimiprzak. The room is on the first floor, and downstairs is a little eating-house and laundry belonging to KATYA SORESTI. The room is bare, but there is a crucifix at one end. In one corner also is an ikon of some kind, and a little shrine.

KATYA'S grandfather was a leader among the Lorians in his day, with the consequence that her habitation has become a meeting place for the Lorians in Przimiprzak, of whom there are a good many. The room is almost full of them now, of all types and classes. The Lorians are a romantic race ; they think more easily in terms of non-material than of material things. They are passionate and rhapsodical. This should be reflected in the general atmosphere of the scene.

At one end of the room is a bare space with

a chair, and by this stands an immensely powerful man with papers in his hand. Near the shrine stands a man in curious garments like a kind of priest. Close to him, sitting by the wall, is a man in incongruously matter-of-fact garments—tweeds and leggings. He is a British missionary called DEANE. All the rest of the people are standing with the exception of old SORESTI, KATYA SORESTI's ancient grandfather, who sits near the window in the back wall, apparently deaf and blind to everything.

As the curtain rises, the priestly individual is repeating a prayer of some kind, or some reverend recitation, in an unknown tongue, and the people repeat it after him. Presently it comes to an end, and there is a dead pause, during which it can be discerned that some woman or girl is crying. Suddenly some one breaks into a kind of chant or keen, and almost immediately every one takes it up. It is so well known in its every turn by all present that it is sung in parts and harmonies with individual variations on the recurring themes. Tradition has here taken the part of special preparation, and done the work more thoroughly. After a time there is silence, and every one sits down.

OLD SORESTI, *hitherto hidden by the standing figures, now is raised over the rest by reason of the curious high chair on which he sits, so as to raise him to the height of the window that he may look out. It is now seen that the individual crying is a girl about eighteen. PARO and LENA are evident towards the front of the crowd—LENA standing out as the only fair person present.*

A Woman's Voice (to the crying girl): Never mind, Sanya, dear, we'll pay them back !

Torino (the big man, calling from his papers): Burino !

Burino : Here !

Torino : Corriero !

Corriero : Here !

Torino : Anita Corriero !

Anita : Here !

Torino : Lanya Corriero !

Corriero : She couldn't come, Torino. She's ill.

Torino : Dutya !

Dutya : Here !

Torino : Truimin Garbadh !

No answer.

Torino : Lena Jackson !

Lena : Here !

Torino : Keprici !

Keprici : Here !

Torino : Lyulla Keprici !

Lyulla : Here !

Torino : Knokmalavilachi ! (*Pause.*) Knokmalavilachi !

Some One : He's away in the Western province.

Torino : Léokon Ruddya.

Another : She's ill, Torino.

Torino : Paro !

Paro : Here !

Torino : Porachi !

Silence.

Torino : Ranskaya !

Ranskaya : I'm here, Torino ! I'm not one of those——

Torino : Sanya !

Sanya : Here, Torino !

Torino : Sgarbi !

Sgarbi : Here !

Torino : Sgarbya !

A pause.

Torino : Soresti !

Pause. Old SORESTI doesn't hear.

Some One : He's here, Torino !

Torino : Katya Soresti—well, she's downstairs.
Sorokino !

Pause. He goes on.

Tars Biorichi !

Tars : Here !

Torino : Tura !

Tura : Here !

Torino : Turillo !

Turillo : Here !

Torino : Ubdallo !

A pause.

Zashi !

Zashi : Here !

Torino : Zephincorachi !

Zephincorachi : Here ! My——

Torino : Marya Zephincorachi !

Zephincorachi : She couldn't come, Torino.

Torino : Zepli !

Zepli : Here !

Every one sits down. There is a pause.
Torino examines his papers.

Torino : I have a further list to read out this week. (*Meaningly*) : Sorokino was among us last Thursday. On Friday a Przimian mob down at Arakhova attached Sorokino's bake-house when he was in bed, dragged him out, and beat him, and wrecked his shop. On Saturday evening Turillo Merinya, first cousin to our Turillo here, was stoned in the streets of Merinya. Up by the Three Trees, Lancia's hay ricks were fired on Monday night.

He says all this quite coldly and rather musingly looking through his papers.

Then we have Sanya's father—well, you all know about that——

All look towards the crying girl.

Finally Ubdallo—when I called over your names this evening, Ubdallo did not reply. . . . (*Slowly*) : Ubdallo had his throat cut in the

streets of Majadalla at seven o'clock last night——

He stops. There is a dead, rigid silence. Suddenly RANSKAYA, a woman, gives a cry from the middle of the crowd—evidently the beginning of a protest—but it is immediately silenced before it becomes anything intelligible. Once more silence reigns.

(Looking up from his papers, after a pause): You have been asking me in these last weeks how long we must watch these things. *(He indicates his papers.)* How long we must suffer. . . . There are some things I can tell you now. A month ago there arose a rumour that the Lorians were preparing an attack. The result has been what you know—events like this. *(He indicates his papers.)* You know too, that had this tale been true, we should have been the first to hear it, for it would fall to us to play our part. . . . But we heard nothing, and you wondered whence this rumour came. I will tell you. . . . *It was invented by the Przimians themselves. . . .*

Long pause.

Woman's Voice (suddenly piercing) : God strike me dead, but——

A cry to be quiet is raised. Silence once more prevails.

Torino : It was invented deliberately by the Przimians themselves. . . . I will tell you why. . . . Fifty years ago there was a war—the war that ended in the Great Flight. Do you know how that war began? (*Long pause.*) Well, it began with just such a report as this. . . . One day there came a rumour that the Lorians were going to make an attack on Przimia. It came to us over the mountains, from the Przimian country. . . . We looked about us and laughed, because we were contemplating no attack. We took no further heed! What was the result? (*With rising animation.*) Within twenty days the Lorians found themselves attacked on all sides by an enemy that pretended it was defending itself against attack! (*Pause.*) Some of you here remember that war——

The Woman (fiercely, breaking out of all restraint) : Remember! Do you think I have forgotten the day when my husband was torn from me, and

killed in front of my eyes? God in heaven !
Let me get at them !

Some one : Sh ! Ranskaya, dear. . . .

Torino : Yes, Ranskaya. We know. . . .
But we have something more to think of now.
(*More quickly*) : Well, that is what happened
fifty years ago. (*Meaningly*) : It is happening
again to-day. . . . A rumour is a useful thing ;
it gives a cover for a great many activities that
otherwise might seem aggressive and unwarranted.
. . . You have all noticed what is going on in
this town ; the strengthening of gates, the clearing
of encumbrances, the hurrying here and hurrying
there. (*Meaningly*) : Friends, do you believe that
all this is done because the Przimians fear that
the Lorians will be at their gates to-morrow ?
No, my friends, don't be deceived. The Lorians
were deceived last time. (*Meaningly*) : My
friends . . . they are not deceived to-day. . . .
(*With animation*) : They know what all this
means. It means . . . What it meant last time.
I will tell you something more. We have in-
formation that at the very moment that the
Przimians were creating this rumour that they
were to be attacked, they were collecting vast
hordes of munitions of war. (*More quickly*) : My
friends, do you want another Great Flight ? Do

you want another ravaging and burning and outraging? Another laying waste by fire and sword?

Growls.

No, by God! They may lay waste and destroy, but they'll answer us first this time! Wait! cries some one, wait till you are attacked! Yes . . . wait till the people are crushed and the harvest of dead is gathered from the smoking hills of Loria! . . . No, friends, this time we shall not wait, but will strike, strong, quick, sudden, terrible, before they are ready.

Growls, rising to a climax—and then silence.

Torino (more quietly): So, friends, the struggle is at hand. The day for which we have looked, for which we have waited, longed, prepared, that day is at length come. What does it mean for us—not for Loria, or for the Przimians, or the world, or freedom, but for Corriero, and Sanya, and Turillo, and Lyulla Keprici? . . . My friends, you have come here for many a Thursday evening now. And it may be now that Zashi comes because Tura comes, and Tura because Zashi

sits close by her ; Ranskaya because she can remember her wrongs amid sympathy ; Konoro because he is among friends who knew him of old ; Burino because he can speculate on adventure and war-like deeds ; I do not know. I say merely it may be so. (*Changing his tone*) : You will come here no more on Thursday evenings. . . . And Zashi must part from Tura, and Tura must think no more of Zashi ; Ranskaya must keep her peace ; and Burino do—and dream no more. Dutya must think no more of his shop, Corriero no more of his horses, nor Zepli of his jokes. Where you have lived, you will live no more ; those whom you have known you will know no more. Everything dear to you must be given up. Such is war ; such is the day we have been looking for, longing for, waiting for. . . . Day by day we do the same things, for many days, months, years ; and then a day comes when we do those things no more. . . . And yet, who would have it otherwise ? Who would not give up all that he has ? (*Going on more quickly, more excited*) : For out there they are coming—(*he points towards the window ; the rest do not look around but keep their eyes intently on him*)—over the hills of Kephinoro, up the valley of the Majadalla, through Orya and Oryssia, up the

Krobijak—the Lorians, my friends, your own people ! Douro and Laniero from Arsalia, twin brothers, cousins of Anita there—(*pointing to Anita Corriero*)—Dutya, the red-headed blacksmith of Kasanovo, your second cousin Truimin ; Kobkari, who was born in the house next to Konoro there, at the mills of Zephko ; Knokmala, for long enough one of us here. These and many others will be there. Shall we not welcome them ? Shall we not prepare for them ? Shall we not help them ? Friends, have you a fire in your hearts ! A fire lit by the hand of God ! A creative fire that will make all things anew ! For you are desperate ! Yes, you ! You, Zashi and Tura, sitting holding hands ; you, Tars Biorchi, thinking of the crops you will raise—and all of you ! Within three days, the line of the mountains will be forced by the Lorians without ! What chance have we, the Lorians within ? We stand here in the very clutches of the enemy ? . . . Yes, but we stand here close to his heart. As he moves to destroy us, let us strike him in the heart. Then he may kill us, but we shall have done our work. . . . Friends, if you need strength, if you lack fire, think of Kurdu Soresti there. (*He points to the old man, who does not hear.*) He is an old man now, but

if he had not been strong when the rest were weak, hopeful when the rest despaired, we should not be here to-day. Each one of you has been living for himself ; let him learn from Kurdu Soresti how to live or die for something greater than himself, something that was before us and will be when we are gone. For a brief space it is granted to us to take up the struggle; to press forward through the dark world, torch in hand. Soon from behind others will overtake us, and bear forward the torch as we disappear in the darkness. . . . (*Changing his tone, after a pause*) : Friends, there are things that must be done in this city to wound the enemy from within, at the moment when he is attacked from without. Twenty-one men are required. Twenty-one must die, for no man can do these things in the midst of an enemy and live. Friends, who shall they be ? I shall be one. We require twenty more. (*He pauses a moment.*) I do not press you. Think it over. He who has more care for his life than for the fire in his heart, let him not come. But those who will, meet me here to-morrow evening at eight o'clock and bring with them as many, among those not here now as are of like mind. May there be twenty who come ! (*With an almost fanatical tone*) : These twenty might sit

above the world and survey it ! But they know that the heart of the world is in the depths, and so they will go down to the depths unknown. And men will speak of things that were done and of worlds that were transformed, and without knowing, it will be of these that they will speak !

He ceases and sits down. There is dead silence. The priest rises. Then some one begins the keen again, and it is gradually taken up all round. The people stand up. Gradually it is superseded by a chanted prayer, and as this grows, the people kneel, except old SORESTI, who remains where he is. The prayer comes to an end and there is silence. Suddenly a shot rings out from outside, quite close. It appears to have been aimed at TORINO, and hits the wall behind him. He rushes into the corner shouting "Keep down," and puts the lamp out. There is darkness. Then the sound of two or three more shots and of falling bodies, and a groan. Then the sound of shutters being drawn across the window, and the door is opened at the far side of the left-hand wall, letting in a stream of yellow light. Whispering occurs, and figures are seen stealing through the door. Presently a match is struck and the lamp

re-lit. The room is now practically empty and very much upset, chairs having been knocked over. Three bodies lie on the floor in a position between where TORINO was standing at the window. They are PARO and LENA JACKSON, and a man who had been sitting just behind these two, who were in the front row. Old SORESTI remains just as before, unmoved. TORINO and DEANE also. TORINO goes to the bodies of the men and examines them. DEANE kneels over LENA.

Torino : They must have just fired at wherever they were able from that house roof over there. Old Soresti isn't touched. He's asleep ! These two are gone. What about her ?

Deane : Yes, I'm afraid she's gone. I'll just. . . . *(He still kneels over her.)*

Torino : She was a countrywoman of yours, that girl, wasn't she, Mr. Deane ?

TORINO stands holding the lamp over his head, and looking down at DEANE and the girl.

Old Soresti (waking up, and moving a little) :
Katya. . . . Where's Katya ? . . . It's time she came to give me my supper. . . .

THE RUMOUR

He continues to whine childishly, and move about in his chair uneasily.

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE II

The curtain falls after the last scene so as to leave space representing the spot where MR. JONES and MR. SMITH separate on their journey from the city each evening.

Enter JONES with his paper and SMITH with his pipe.

Jones (sagely, as they come in) : Oh, a shocking crowd they are—something dreadful, always fighting, always out for a scrap. They're not civilised at all really, that's where people make the mistake.

They have arrived at the centre of the stage, where they have stopped preparatory to parting.

They're just a tribe, a kind of savage tribe—that's what most people don't realise ; but I know, because my wife's brother-in-law, he's been out there—and he's told me about them. Now these Primians—they're a decent crowd.

You can do business with them, he says. But these Lorians, they're a terrible crowd, and dirty—(*he sinks his voice*)—he says you can smell them yards away. . . . So I'm not on the whole surprised this has come. The truth is, they're jealous, that's where it is. You see, these Primian chaps next door are rich—that's where it is. They do a lot of trade, their place is covered with factories. And these others, these Lorians, they never do any, and they want some of the wealth next door. But damn me, I say, if they want it, why can't they work for it, like any one else. But you know some people are like that, we've all met them. People who won't work for themselves, but as soon as they see what others earn want to grab it.

Smith : Ay. You're right there. . . . There's lots like that. How are your cucumber frames ?

Jones (suddenly enthusiastic) : Oh, I expect by the time I get back George will have finished them. He had the day off to-day from where he works—he didn't go to the city.

Smith : He's in Taylor and Wright's, isn't he ?

Jones : Yes. He'll do well, I expect. . . . But I bet he's been on those frames all day long. Do you know they've cost me close on twelve

pound—not a penny less though we did all the work ourselves. . . . But it's worth it. It's no good—you can't grow cucumbers in small frames. They simply won't grow.

Smith : No. You're right there.

Jones : Good-night.

Smith : Good-night, Sam.

They go out in different directions.

ACT II

SCENE III

Three days later. MR. LENNARD'S office.

Lennard (dictating to his secretary): “. . . In the event of a clash, I have no doubt that the Przimians will win, because it is to the interest of several of the Great Powers not only that they should not be destroyed but that their territory should be extended at the expense of the Lorians. I am prepared, therefore, to supply them, on my own authority, with anything they may require. If they can't pay for it, some one else will. But the Lorians are another matter, and before accepting their contract, I should be glad of definite instructions from headquarters.” Thank you.

The secretary rises and goes out, but returns a moment later and announces that MR. MOODIE has arrived. He is shown in. LENNARD rises and they shake hands.

Moodie (very spruce and cheerful) : Ha, good-morning, Lennard ! How are you ?

Lennard : Very well, thanks. And you ? You look brown.

Moodie : Yes, rather. Last week-end I was up fishing in the Majadalla Lake. I needed a rest, I'd just come back from England, I've been having a pretty warm time just lately. . . . Anyhow, you see we brought that hasty little devil, La Rubia, round all right after all ?

Lennard (vaguely) : Yes. . . . So I understand.

Moodie : Not such a bad bit of work. Poor old La Rubia, after all his talk we managed to make him toe the line pretty quick ! . . . Yes, we can't have any tampering with British prestige. That's one thing we won't have. It's not, you'll understand, Lennard, that we want to coerce any one. We don't ; I don't. The British Empire has never stood for that sort of thing. It stands for self-determination and the freedom of small nations. But here it's a matter of *vital prestige*. We're acting on their behalf really. You see, we simply can't afford to let the prestige of the Simian people drop to the level they'd let it. But, do you know, even now, if you please, La Rubia's doing his best to hush up the fact that

these orders have been placed, or any steps taken by way of preparation. Think of it ! Trying to hide from the Lorians the fact that they'll get a damned good hiding if they try any of their games on ! Well, I tell you I've seen to it that the Lorians know all right !

Lennard : Yes, I expect they know all right, by now. . . .

Moodie (struck by his tone) : Oh, why ?

Lennard : Well, if murders and massacres and shootings can tell them anything.

Moodie : Yes, I know. I've been away, of course, but I heard something about that. . . . Yes—well, of course—(*sinking his voice*)—I don't agree with that sort of thing, but between ourselves I don't mind telling you that I'm not sure it isn't one of the best things that could have happened. It'll show the Lorians that the Simians have some spirit left—even if their Government haven't. . . . Well, I only hope I've been in time. I risked my soul in the bluff I used, about things being ready when they weren't. But I think—I say, I think it will be discovered that I've saved the situation, or rather it will *not* be discovered, because things never are in this world. People never get what they deserve !

The secretary enters and announces the arrival of MR. LA RUBIA, and a moment later he enters in a state of excitement.

La Rubia : Good-morning, gentlemen. I'm sorry to be so abrupt, but the situation demands it. Well now, Mr. Lennard, what d'you think of this ! Of course I suppose you're a business man, and I suppose that's what you do in business, but really I think the British Government might be above such a thing.

Lennard : But what—what is the——

La Rubia : We've been tricked, sir. The representatives of the British Government have tricked us, lied to us. That information about the Lorians was completely unfounded—not a word of truth in it. I've discovered the source of the report, so I know. The Lorians were as quiet as they've ever been. At a moment like that, the British Government must needs threaten to withdraw certain facilities that are vital to us if we don't strengthen our munitions supply and defences—all because some financiers are absurdly nervous.

Moodie : La Rubia, I'm sorry to cut you short, but you're merely wasting time. I am no longer willing to argue with you as to the reasons which

make us require you to take this action. I merely tell you that if you don't, we shall withdraw those facilities to which you have referred. You can choose which course you like.

La Rubia (more slowly) : Mr. Moodie, let me put a question to you. If I can prove to you, on evidence that you cannot ignore, that the Lorians are not contemplating any attack, will you agree to withdraw your pressure ?

Moodie : If you could do such a thing, La Rubia, I might be willing to consider it. But unfortunately there is no possibility that you can.

La Rubia : Wait a minute, sir, wait a minute. I am contemplating a step which perhaps has not occurred to you. You are going to force us to load ourselves with a lot of stuff, not only that we've no use for but that it's highly dangerous for us to possess. Look at the brawls and killings there have been, that we've been unable to restrain, simply arising out of this foolish rumour. Already they've made the position very much more difficult. Your British firms set the example by making preparations as though there was going to be a siege, and some of ours take fright and do the same. All this makes things terribly difficult. And then on the top of this, suppose it gets known that we're placing large orders, there's no knowing

what the effect may be. The situation is most delicate. For years now we've managed it with the greatest tact, and that is beginning to bear fruit. But suppose we do this and it gets known. That would be a first-class blunder. A very great deal is involved ; and in the circumstances I have no course but one left, and that I am going to take. Here you and I, Mr. Moodie, are quarrelling about what the Lorian are going to do. (*Suddenly pointing at Mr. Lennard.*) There, Mr. Moodie, sits the man who can tell us ! I ask you, Mr. Lennard, in order to settle a matter which may involve the lives and happiness of thousands, to tell us what orders the Lorian Government has been placing with you recently !

The other two sit surprised, LENNARD looking very stern.

Lennard (after a moment) : I don't quite follow you, Mr. La Rubia.

La Rubia : I ask you, Mr. Lennard, in order to settle a matter in which a very great deal is involved, to tell Mr. Moodie and myself what orders the Lorian Government has recently placed with you.

Lennard (shocked, in a remonstrative tone) : But,

Mr. La Rubia, you don't really imagine, do you, that I can tell any one—even my own Government—what contracts I have, across a table at an informal conference? Of course I can't. . . . Would you like me to disclose to the Lorians the contracts you are contemplating having to place with us? . . . Of course you wouldn't; and of course you know very well that I won't.

La Rubia (excited): You mean to say you won't tell me? When, by a word now, you might save a dreadful catastrophe. You hold us both in the hollow of your hands and you play us against each other like pawns!

Lennard: I do nothing of the sort. I am a mere man of business. I sell a certain kind of article, called munitions of war, for which the world appears to have a great need. I have no policy in these matters, except to maintain the reserve usual in business, though apparently not always usual in politics.

La Rubia: In politics, sir, we have to do with human beings, beings of flesh and blood, lit with the divine fire. To you a human being is nothing but an object to be destroyed by your munitions. You are a monster, sir; your company is a monster, stalking about the world like a Black Death, killing where it goes. You possess

information which might save the lives of thousands, of tens of thousands of human beings, the happiness of a thousand homes. And you will not reveal it, because your *business* interests lie in another direction.

Lennard (perfectly calm) : You are completely mistaken. As I have told you, in these matters I have no policy, except to keep faith with my clients and maintain the reserve as to their commitments, which every one of them—including *yourself*—desires. And do you suppose that such honesty pays? do you suppose that if I threw honesty to the winds, and entered on a policy of juggling with your fears and hopes, I could not exact from you, and from all the rest of the powers of the world an amount vastly greater than that which you now rush to give me? I'm afraid, La Rubia, that while you may know all about politics, you don't know anything about business. And I begin to doubt your boasted acquaintance with human nature. . . .

La Rubia : Then you refuse to tell me?

Lennard : Most certainly I do.

La Rubia : Very well, sir. Then my answer is this. . . . I refuse to act at the dictation of any one in this matter, no matter what threats they may hold over my head. I will place no

orders with you, and the British Government—and their representative—may swallow that as best they can. I bid you good-day, gentlemen.

He turns with a grand defiant gesture and walks rapidly towards the door.

Enter secretary.

Secretary: Mr. La Rubia, this is an urgent paper from your secretary. The messenger asked me to give it to you at once.

LA RUBIA takes the paper, and opens it. As he reads his attitude changes. The telephone meanwhile has rung.

Lennard: Yes. . . . Yes ! . . . That's a strategic position, isn't it ? . . . Yes. (*He puts down the receiver. To La Rubia*): Well ? . . . The Lorian light troops have occupied the Zarina triangle, I'm told.

Slight pause.

Moodie (leaping up): What ? . . . (*After a moment, sinking down again*): Then I was too late ! Too late after all. . . . Well, La Rubia ?

THE RUMOUR

83

You see ! You brought it on yourself. I told you so. I warned you. . . . Well, I did my best—that's one thing.

LA RUBIA *stands rigid.*

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE IV

NED'S office (as before); NED stands motionless. A head appears cautiously—LUKE'S. Then LUKE enters in a state of excitement.

Luke : Oh, you're alone. . . . I say, have you heard the news from Przimia ?

Ned : Yes.

Luke : Well, what are you going to do about it ? There's not a share we're interested in worth a cent !

Ned (after gazing a moment at the agitated Luke) : Buy. . . . Buy. . . . Buy everything I can lay my hands on !

LUKE stands paralysed with surprise. NED continues to gaze at him.

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE I

The PRIME MINISTER'S room. About eleven o'clock in the morning, a few weeks later.

The PRIME MINISTER sits at a long table flanked by the CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER and a private secretary. Opposite is a deputation of prosperous looking business men. One of them in the front row is speaking as the curtain rises.

First Speaker: . . . What are the facts? What, sir, are the facts, as we have them on the authority of no less a person than the Mr. Jackson, father of the girl in question? His daughter, Lena Jackson, was deliberately decoyed by a villain belonging to the Lorian race into the company of these villains, who murder her. The first act of these dastardly people on entering a war is to murder an innocent young girl, the

subject of a completely neutral nation. Such an insult offered to a great nation like our own cannot be borne, ought not to be borne ; here we have to do with a savage people liable to attacks of degrading licentiousness only known among hordes, and that is why the inaction of our Government in the matter has roused such indignation among our people. For don't deceive yourself, sir ; that it has roused widespread indignation there can be no doubt. Day by day during the last week, the Press has devoted leading articles to the topic of the foul murder by savage hordes of this innocent young girl. Her picture is in every paper, and our friend Sir George Darnell here (*he points to him*) will tell you, if you care to ask him, how the circulation of every paper has risen as a result. Again, with complete spontaneity, there has arisen a movement which has taken shape in the Lena Jackson Society, of which I have the honour to be president, whose object is to see that adequate reparation is made for this atrocious act, and for the protection of the womanhood of Britain in far countries. Another impulse generated in the heart of our people has taken shape in the Lena Jackson Memorial-Fund, of which Lady Runabout is president. As you

know, this very evening Lady Runabout is giving a ball at her house in Cadogan Square in aid of the fund. . . . This and other things indicate the depth to which this terrible calamity has penetrated to the core and heart of every class and section of the British people ; and I warn you, sir, that the consequences of any further inaction on the part of the Government will be very serious. Speaking in the name of the Associated Industries and Commerce Confederation, with full realisation of my responsibility, I say that in the event of any continued inaction on the part of the Government, we should have to consider very seriously what steps we should take to make our views effective. The Government relies for money and credit on the business community—and may I remind you, sir, that *this* Government relies directly on our support ; we helped to put you where you are—you know we did !

“ *Hear ! Hear !* ” *and some laughter.*
The PRIME MINISTER smiles.

Money and credit you've had from us in the past, and money and credit you expect from us in the future. Well, I warn you, if steps are

not taken to see that this dastardly outrage is avenged—well, you won't get it, that's all !

He wipes his brow and sits down amid applause and SIR GEORGE DARNELL *risés.*

Sir George : I'm a newspaper man, sir. (*Laughter.*) I don't deny it. (*More laughter.*) Strange to say I have no wish to deny it. . . . I don't wish to intrude except to tell you a little story which somewhat vividly illustrates what Sir Arthur Cheston has just said in regard to the depth to which indignation has penetrated to the very soul of our people. Yesterday a man walked into my office, a common ordinary typical man. "When is something going to be done about Lena Jackson," he said. "Well," I said, "these are difficult questions, you know." "Difficult questions be damned," he said, "if this——" Well, sir, I won't say what he called the Government. (*Laughter.*) "If they don't do something at once," he said, "I'll go out myself and avenge her." That's the spirit of England at this moment, sir. (*Applause.*) And what's more, I'm with it ! And I shall use such influence as I possess to see that the will of the people—the only view that a race with any pride left could take—is made effective.

SIR GEORGE *sits down amid great applause.*

SIR R. MORTIMER, *a rather old, deaf, very stout man, leader of the deputation because a man of great standing, who has been listening to SIR GEORGE with his hand to his ear ; in what is meant to be an aside, but is in fact a loud hoarse whisper to SIR GEORGE.*

Sir Robert Mortimer : I saw that about the man in your office in one of your papers yesterday. You had it in all your papers with your photograph and the man's, my secretary tells me. . . . What do you pay a man for a thing like that ?

Embarrassment. SIR ARTHUR CHESTON *has been nudging and pulling at SIR ROBERT MORTIMER for some time in an endeavour to stop him and make him understand that it is his turn to rise and make the final speech. At length he makes himself understood.*

Sir Robert (hastily) : Oh, yes . . . yes. . . . *(He rises ponderously, then with tremendous emphasis) :* Sir, I rise to say a final word in the name of humanity ! I am a business man, sir, have been all my life, but to-day I rise as a *man*, and speak in the name of humanity. I don't intend

to allude to the economic situation at all. I have no need to remind you that at this moment British capital in Przimia is being destroyed at a rate that is appalling to think of, and that if the Government can't be trusted to protect British capital abroad, the credit of the Government is bound to suffer. Nor do I intend to refer to the fact, obvious though it is, that if our Government fail in their duty, France will gain at our expense, and we shall have lost one more first-rate sphere of commercial influence, purely through the ineptitude of our Government ! . . . No ! These are not the things that are in our minds to-day. . . . A month ago, sir, a young British girl was foully murdered, and ever since that day a riot of destruction has been proceeding, carried out by a barbarous race and perpetrated upon a thriving industrious people. I have no need to refer to the available statistics which show the high state of civilisation existing in Przimia, nor do I intend to. (*He produces a paper.*) I need only remark, sir, that fifty years ago, in the year following the war between the Przimians and the Lorians, the Przimians possessed—(*he pauses, manœuvring his spectacles, so as to read the figures*)—possessed altogether three hundred and sixty-seven miles of railway track—together.

Two hundred and eighty-seven single track—ninety double track ; and roughly twenty-eight miles of triple track and over. The figures for four years ago—the latest available—give two thousand seven hundred and sixty-nine miles of track altogether. Two thousand seven hundred and sixty-nine, think of it ! The previous figure was—(*he hunts about*)—three hundred and sixty-seven. That's in some fifty years. . . . Twelve hundred and seventy single track ; five hundred and sixty-nine and a half miles of double track ; and over seventy miles of triple track and over. Until the country was over-run by the Lorians, there were all these tracks humming with industry—humming with industry ! I designed many of the engines myself—or rather my engineers did—so I ought to know. Now take population——

P. Minister (to stop him) : Those figures are very interesting, Sir Robert ? Might I have them ?

Sir Robert (not hearing) : Fifty years ago, four-fifths—eh ?

SIR ARTHUR *has been nudging him.*

Oh, what did you say, sir ?

P. Minister : I said, Sir Robert, those figures are very interesting. Would you give them to me ?

Sir Robert (pleased) : Oh, certainly, certainly. Here they are.

P. Minister : Thank you.

Sir Robert (deprived of his figures) : Well—er—however, let me return to my main point. (*With immense solemnity*) : I repeat : That is *not* what is in the minds and hearts of us all to-day. As I say, a month ago, a young British girl was foully murdered by a barbarous race of savages. I say that deliberately—a barbarous race of savages. The Lorian, sir, has no power of development, of civilisation. Their transit system alone is enough to show that. Their rolling-stock is abominable and they have the most antiquated system of signal-locking in the world ! . . . I was on a special committee, sir, which visited that part of the world fifteen years ago to examine this very——

The curtain descends at this point to indicate a lapse of time. After a short space it rises finding SIR ROBERT still speaking but in a more emphatic tone. All the rest have sunk into despondent attitudes, except SIR ARTHUR

CHESTON *who is nudging* SIR ROBERT *and plucking at his sleeve, and the* PRIME MINISTER, *who maintains his courteous attention.*

Sir Robert : Here is a race of savages which has over-run the whole of Przimia and is busy burning and destroying what British capital has built up. Are we to stand by and see this happen and do nothing ? Is our Government going to stand by and see this country ruined by a horde of savages ? Can a Government that professes to represent the people of this country stand by and do nothing ? Is our Government that relies for credit on the business community going to see the wealth upon which that credit is based destroyed ? . . .

SIR ARTHUR *has now succeeded in gaining his attention and hands him a slip of paper which he reads.*

Well, Sir Arthur here tells me, sir, that I mustn't take up any more of your time, and he's probably right. I will, therefore, merely conclude by saying that I hope no doubt has been left in your mind as to the determination of this country to avenge the hideous wrong perpetrated by a

barbarous race upon our young countrywoman in the very flower and morning of her innocent maidenhood.

Applause and relief. SIR ROBERT *sits down and the PRIME MINISTER rises.*

P. Minister : Well, gentlemen, my colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer here and I have listened with deep interest to the moving appeal which you have made to us ; and you may be sure that we shall give the closest consideration to all that you have said. More than that I cannot say at this moment. A statement is to be made in the House of Commons next Thursday, and on that occasion it will be my duty to announce the policy of His Majesty's Government in the matter. I would warn you, however, gentlemen, that this is a very serious step which you are urging—very serious. We cannot lightly interfere in a conflict of this sort. War, gentlemen—costs money. It may even cost more money than is saved by putting an end to the destruction of British property. •

Cries of “ No ! No ! ” “ Prestige.”
“ Impossible.” “ Government's Credit,” etc.

My friend says it is impossible. Well, I don't agree with him. War, gentlemen, is very expensive. . . . These then are serious considerations and we must weigh them with all the earnestness we possess. But in our deliberations I am sure I am expressing the feelings of my colleagues in the Cabinet when I say that we shall find most valuable the views that you have been good enough to put before us to-day. I thank you, gentlemen.

He sits down. The deputation rise and gradually depart, shepherded by the secretary. Meanwhile SIR ROBERT MORTIMER approaches the PRIME MINISTER, who rises to greet him.

Sir Robert: Look here, Overton, you can't afford to do it. It's no good. You needn't try it. I know the City, and I know what they're saying. Those men I brought with me to-day—do you know they stand solid, solid as a rock, and among them they hold the controlling interest in (*with extreme reverence*) close on three hundred and fifty million of capital. You can't stand against that ! It's no good !

He turns away, but suddenly turns back again.

And don't let any of those damned labour people be getting at you behind closed doors as they're so fond of doing. If you let yourselves be influenced by a pack of scoundrels like that, you've no right to call yourself a Government. If they try a strike, I'd shove them into jail. It's treason sir, stark treason ! It's no ordinary strike, but a strike at the very heart of the community. . . . And I tell you what it is, strike or no strike, if you don't act pretty quick in this affair, the City will strike, sir, as far as the Government are concerned ; and I reckon that'll be a worse strike for you than the other kind !

He goes out full of forceful threatening breeziness. All the rest have disappeared, except the CHANCELLOR who now walks over to the window. He pauses a moment looking out, while the PRIME MINISTER remains sitting where he is. Then he turns round and coming back stands a moment in front of the PRIME MINISTER looking down at him, across the table.

Chancellor (meaningly): You must do it, Overton.

P. Minister: Yes. I'm afraid we must take a firm line, though I hate involving ourselves in these squabbles.

Chancellor: My dear sir, it'll be a great deal cheaper in the end to throw some men and guns into Przimia than to stand the racket if we don't. If we don't we shall forfeit confidence in a way we simply can't afford. Besides we get a lot out of Przimia now, and if it was in the hands of the Lorians we should get nothing. That's an argument to which there's no answer, and it applies to us all, labour included.

P. Minister (resignedly): Yes, I suppose so. (*Thoughtfully*): But I can't help having an old-fashioned prejudice against coercion carried out at the dictation of the business community. . . .

Chancellor: My dear sir, so long as we exist through the activities of the business community we can't avoid their dictating. And as for coercion, don't you worry. Whether we move or not won't make any difference to the Lorians, except as to the language spoken by the men who smash them, because if we don't, France will. The only difference will be that France will have gained what we lose—an extraordinarily

rich commercial connection and sphere of influence.

Slight pause. The PRIME MINISTER rings a bell. Enter secretary.

P. Minister : Cancel the meeting at four o'clock this afternoon and tell them at the War Office I'll see General Bullen then.

Exit secretary.

I've got the labour people coming this morning, and also a man from the spot, who was there apparently when this thing happened.

Chancellor (putting his top hat on the back of his head) : Oh, these men from the spot, they always crop up, and they never matter a damn. My experience is they generally know less about an affair in its significant aspects than any one else.

P. Minister : Yes, and the worst of it is they take up other people's time. I wouldn't have worried about this chap Deane, only he's got round Asherfield and comes with a special note of introduction.

Chancellor : Oh, Deane? He's one of the crowd that was there when she was killed, isn't he?

P. Minister (slightly humorous): Yes, so it appears. That's why Asherfield thinks I ought to see him. . . .

Chancellor: Well, mind he doesn't knife you, that's all. . . . And as for Grange and his Labour crowd, I tell you these Labour people are in the same boat as ourselves. Unemployment—rub that into them—and slap plenty of sentiment into the foreground.

He goes out, jauntily wise. Enter PR. SECRETARY with papers.

Pr. Secretary (putting papers before Prime Minister): There are the papers. The main thing's his original letter, in which he says he knows all about the murder and was there when it was committed. Then there's a note from the Intelligence people. Bertram says he regards him with suspicion.

P. Minister (glancing cursorily at the papers): Yes—well, I expect Bertram regards me with suspicion . . . I have yet to meet the man he doesn't. . . .

PR. SECRETARY smiles.

Pr. Secretary (looking at some other papers): Bertram interviewed him personally, and didn't like the look of him, and thinks he may be a Bolshevik agent. He's been hand-in-glove with the Lorians for years, and is obviously trying to play their game. Bertram also got a statement from Lena Jackson's father, about this man—in which some serious charges are made against him. . . . He seems to have taken Lord Asherfield in completely.

P. Minister: Yes, they all do. . . . All right. Ask him to come in. Just leave us together. I don't want any one.

Exit SECRETARY, and moment later DEANE is ushered in. He looks bewildered, and is dressed in what he supposes to be, but is not, the correct dress for London.

(Going forward with a smile): Mr. Deane? Come in. Good-morning. Sit down.

DEANE sits down.

P. Minister: Well, now, I'm afraid you'll think we're putting you to a lot of trouble. But, you see, these matters are really very serious for

us, and we want all the help we can get, and since you come from the spot, your view naturally needs consideration.

Deane (eagerly): Not at all. That's exactly what I want. It's quite clear that there's some terrible mistake somewhere. When a word could save the whole situation it seems to me it would be criminal not to give that word, and so I felt bound to do it.

P. Minister: Well, now, if I may come straight to the point. You say in your letter that you were there at the time when this dreadful incident occurred? May I ask how you came to be there?

Deane: Well, you see, in connection with my mission work, twice a year I always used to visit the Przimia Lorians as they are called, that is to say, the Lorians who live in what used to be their country, but is now in Przimian hands. I always stayed in the house of Katya Soresti—the granddaughter of a prominent Lorian leader. It so happens that it was also in a room in that house that the Lorian Club held its meetings, and in course of time it became a regular thing for me to attend these meetings. Then this excitement arose, and the club became involved politically, and on the evening in question they

had, in fact, some highly secret business to perform. It would have been natural therefore to exclude me. But that is just the kind of thing the Lorian nature could not do. If you're their friend, they trust you. And so I went and sat in my usual place, and was there when this dreadful thing occurred.

P. Minister : I see. . . . What was the nature of the business they were transacting that evening ?

Deane : Well, I fear I'm not at liberty to disclose that. You see, they trusted me.

P. Minister : Yes. . . . You must remember that these are no ordinary matters. These are high matters of state.

Deane (smiling) : Quite. But I can't see that that is any reason to break one's promises regarding them. Besides, I give you my word that these matters have no bearing on our present discussion.

P. Minister : Well . . . that perhaps might be a matter of opinion. However. . . . You say that misapprehension exists in this country.

Deane : Yes. To begin with, on all hands one hears praise of the Przimian and execration of the Lorian. Now that is a most unfortunate mistake for which I cannot account, and which could not

possibly be made by any one who knows the two peoples. The Lorian is a cleaner, simpler, stronger, more self-reliant person than the Przimian. One circumstance alone shows that. He has been able to resist, as the Przimian has not, the industrial invasion of the last fifty years. Now the significance of that fact alone does not appear to be appreciated over here.

P. Minister (with a slight enigmatic smile) : Oh, I think you'll find that it is, Mr. Deane. . . .

Deane (eagerly) : It cannot be, sir, or there could not be this outcry for action against the Lorians. Do you realise, sir, that if such action is taken, it will mean nothing less than the completion of the crime that was committed fifty years ago, and the final extinction of a generous, noble race of men and women, in favour of an industrialised proletariat, who have lost all their racial dignity and culture under the influence of foreign capital ?

P. Minister : What crime do you refer to, Mr. Deane ?

Deane : The crime of the Treaty of Rymania, sir, when the Lorians were robbed of the best part——

P. Minister (suavely) : Yes. You mustn't think I can accept that view of the matter.

(*Impressively*): The treaty which you designate as a crime bears the sanction of all the Great Powers of Europe.

Deane: I beg your pardon, sir. The Great Powers no doubt did not foresee the consequences of what they were doing. The Great Powers concerned *cannot* have realised that as a result of that treaty, a fair country would become the happy hunting ground of a host of greedy adventurers in search of gain. Let us therefore call it a mistake. But I see great danger that that mistake owing to a misapprehension will be repeated, with consequences even worse than those on the previous occasion. . . . I assure you, sir, and any one conversant with the country will tell you the same—that if the Lorians are overwhelmed in this war, it will inevitably mean the complete industrialisation of the whole of that area, and the disappearance of an ancient and noble independent race. You have only to realise that, sir, I am sure, to see that any action in that direction is unthinkable—— !

Pause.

P. Minister (firmly changing the subject): You knew this English girl, Lena Jackson, I gather ?

Deane : Oh, yes, very well. She came ~~to the~~ Lorian Club, because the man she was engaged to was a member.

P. Minister : Was engaged to ? You are sure of that ?

Deane : I always understood so both from her and from him.

P. Minister : You had, I gather, Mr. Deane, considerable influence with these people ?

Deane : Some influence—yes.

P. Minister : And especially, I imagine, had you cared to exercise it, with this girl, since she was English like yourself ?

Deane : Oh, yes. I have no doubt.

P. Minister (*suddenly abandoning the rather passive attitude he has adopted hitherto, with finality*) : Well, Mr. Deane, I'm afraid you have a good deal to answer for.

Deane (*surprised*) : Me—in what way ?

P. Minister : Well, you allowed her knowingly to become involved with these people.

Deane : Involved with these people ? But I see no harm——

P. Minister : Nevertheless, that is how she came by her death. You never even informed her father, I understand. . . .

Deane : Why should I inform him, when

he knew already? Besides, I didn't know him.

P. Minister : As I understand it, your view is that the shot which killed the girl came from outside, and you assume it was from a Przimian source.

Deane : It is not my view, it is the fact that the shot came from outside, and there's no doubt what the source was. The shot was not aimed at the girl. It was aimed at the Lorian leader, Torino. The evidence is clear enough. There had, during the previous weeks, been numerous attacks on the Lorians by the Przimians.

P. Minister : Yes, but we are not concerned with them, and you mustn't forget that we have the strongest corroborative evidence of the view of the matter taken here in the subsequent actions of the Lorians themselves in the territory they have over-run. Burning, pillaging, behaving in the most dastardly manner——

Deane : And who in war does not, sir? That point has been made much of over here, and anything more absurd could not be imagined. I've seen war, you see. You sit here in an arm-chair and talk about it. I've seen it. If you blunder into a village one day, having been for hours shooting and killing, and liable at any

moment to be killed yourself, do you imagine that you think as much of sticking and shooting a few people, as you would of walking out from here now and killing people in cold blood in Whitehall. All I can say is that if that were so, there'd be no wars, because only born murderers would fight them, and there aren't enough murderers to go round. *Of course*, there are dreadful, terrible, disgusting things being done in this war, as in every war. There's no time to think. The actual fighters have no time to think. They act on instinct, and the instinct they act on because it's the one that's been called uppermost in them, is pugnacity, downing others, asserting yourself, killing. And it's not the fighters that are to blame for this, but those who send them to fight ; those through whom the fighting has come about !

The PRIME MINISTER has appeared for some time hardly to be listening, as though it would not be quite nice to listen to such things. He now takes the field again.

P. Minister : Yes. . . . Of course all this, you know, is really quite irrelevant. Frankly,

Mr. Deane, I don't agree with you. If I may say so, the facts are too strong. A young girl one evening goes into the house of a Lorian. She never comes out alive. The strong presumption is that she was killed in that house—especially considering what we know of the Lorians. You only presume the Przimians did it on the ground of some alleged violence that had already taken place. Well, if it comes to that the contrary view is supported on much stronger evidence of the very same kind, the terrible indecencies and violences subsequently committed by the Lorians. Again, you are an Englishman and were presumably unbiased. Therefore I was desirous of hearing what you had to say. Frankly, after hearing you, I can't regard you as unbiased. It is quite clear that you are biased strongly on the Lorian side. You confess yourself that you have lived among and been friendly with these people. You have allowed a young girl to get into their clutches with the most terrible results. They have taken you into their councils—their most secret councils—councils which you now, though ostensibly acting in a neutral capacity, refuse to disclose, possibly because they would not bear the light of day.

DEANE *is completely bewildered by this unexpected attack.*

The short and long of it is, as I say, that I'm not prepared to adopt your view. But, as a matter of fact, that is comparatively unimportant. You see, it's often forgotten that we live in a democratic state. People talk about the illusion of democracy and so on, but I assure you that any one in my position knows that it's very far from an illusion. Suppose I did agree with you, do you think it would matter? People, you see, are roused about this. Either I've got to give some definite effect to their feeling, or I've got to answer the case as they see it with a better one. Now, frankly, the case you have put to me is not a better one. It has failed to convince *me*, and the people of this country are, I assure you, much more difficult to convince than I am. (*He rises.*) If you disbelieve me, take your case to any newspaper office and see what they'll say.

He has left his desk and is standing between DEANE and the door. DEANE has felt himself compelled to rise also, and now feels an overwhelming compulsion to take his departure. Enter SECRETARY.

Secretary : Mr. Grange's deputation has been waiting some time.

P. Minister : Oh, yes. I must see them at once.

SECRETARY *disappears, and the* PRIME MINISTER *approaches* DEANE *smiling.*

P. Minister : Well, Mr. Deane, I'm afraid I've no more time, but the view you have put forward has been of great interest, and I'm very grateful. . . . I suppose you have seen wars before, then ?

Deane : Oh, yes, on and off, in different parts of the world.

P. Minister : You've travelled a good deal, then ?

Deane : Yes. I've been all over the world, more or less.

P. Minister : Dear me. . . . It's curious how different people's careers differ. Now I've seldom been outside England and never outside Europe. I've always been too busy. . . . However . . . but you know, my dear fellow, it's really no good, this sort of thing. You'd much better not have tried it. We live in a world of practical affairs, and we can't afford to let

ourselves be carried away. . . . I assure you I mean what I say, and to show you that it's quite genuine, if you'll let my secretary know, I'll put you in touch with Sir George Darnell. See what he makes of it. . . . But I should be careful ! Because there are quite other explanations of your conduct than the one you give. You might get yourself into trouble. . . . Good-morning !

He smiles delightfully.

Deane (completely bewildered) : Good-morning !

He is shepherded out, being enveloped as he goes in the Labour deputation that is coming in. The PRIME MINISTER gets back behind his table, standing smiling upon the deputation, and recognising and greeting with a smile some of the members. They settle down, and MR. GRANGE rises.

Grange : Mr. Prime Minister, I rise to place before you a resolution passed by a special Trade Union Congress called to consider this among other matters. The resolution is to the effect that (he reads from a bit of paper) " This Congress of trade union representatives, realising the

gravity of the international situation, pledges itself to resist any and every form of military and naval intervention in the present war between the people of Przimia and those of Loria." . . . Now, sir, there are a great many things I could say, but I know your time is valuable, as is also that of the members of this deputation, so I will confine myself to just one or two remarks, and I may tell you in case you are getting a bit nervous that none of the other members of the deputation propose to say anything.

Laughter.

I'm going to do all the talking myself.

A Member: Go along, George, we like it almost as much as you do !

Laughter.

Grange: Well now, sir, I venture to think it is not necessary to say much, because the case is quite clear. What are the facts? We are being asked to enter a war—— .

P. Minister: Oh, no, Mr. Grange, you have not yet been asked to do anything. .

Grange: Well, it looks very likely that we

shall be asked to enter a war because, at the outbreak of that war, one of the contending parties committed a murder upon a young English girl. That, we are told, is a reason for our intervention on behalf of the other contending party. Now, sir, in hot blood, and taking a sentimental view of affairs, I agree that it might appear so. But we, sir, cannot afford to be led away by such considerations ; we must look at this fact soberly, and the first fact that meets the eye is that intervention on behalf of one individual who has been killed means that not one but many thousands of individuals will be killed and maimed. Now, sir, I ask you, is that common sense ?

“ Hear ! Hear ! ” and “ That’s a fair question ! ”

And I will ask you one other question, sir. I will ask you one other question, not unconnected, I think, with the one I have just put. This murder was committed over a month ago. How, sir, does it come about that nothing was heard of it, no agitation was raised for over a month !

“ Hear ! Hear ! ”

How was it nothing was said about it until it became evident to the capitalists of this country

that if they didn't take some drastic action, their capital invested in Perzimmiperzake and other places in Przimia was in danger of being lost ?

A general roar ; then silence.

Sir, I suggest that this outcry is a product of the capitalist interest in this country, and that it has as its aim and object the protection of capitalist property by means of the labour and lives of the proletariat of this country.

Cheers.

That, sir, is our sober. . . .

The curtain descends to indicate a lapse of time.

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The curtain rises upon MR. GRANGE much heated by his own eloquence in the interval. He is now leaning forward, red in the face, speaking rapidly, having left his laboured argumentative style far behind. Applause as curtain rises again.

You know, sir, as well as I do, that I have always

opposed direct action because I believe in the ballot-box. But no action by the ballot-box can meet the situation to-day. And therefore we are justified, I say, in taking the most extreme measures—ay, revolutionary measures, even revolutionary measures to prevent the labour and lives of the proletariat of this country being used to safeguard the wealth of capitalists in foreign lands. You may say what you like, but you know, we all know, that it is not the welfare of the inhabitants of those lands that is being considered ; it is not, I say, the good deeds of the Perzimians or the bad deeds of the Lorians that are weighing in this matter, but the economic power of a handful of capitalists and financiers, who think they can dictate to the proletariat of this country as they sometimes dictate to the Government of this country. But we intend to show them that they can't do anything of the sort. That's our answer. If they want war, they can have it, here at home, without going out to Perzimia or anywhere else to look for it.

Great applause.

Ay, but it'll be a war they'll have to fight themselves and not get other people to fight for them !

More applause. MR. GRANGE *sits down, and wipes his forehead.* The PRIME MINISTER *rises.*

P. Minister : Gentlemen, I had not, as a matter of fact, intended to say anything this morning, but Mr. Grange has so completely misapprehended the situation, that I feel I must make a remark or two, merely by way of explanation.

And first, gentlemen, let me deprecate this heat—this suggestion of a capitalist conspiracy and so on. Let us look at the facts coolly, as Mr. Grange at one point in his speech recommended us to do. I fear that at another point perhaps he rather forgot his own advice.

He smiles. MR. GRANGE *smiles and shakes his head.*

Well now, Mr. Grange suggests that the outcry that the recent events in Przimia have caused is mere sentimentality, that it has been engineered, and that to pay any attention to it would mean fighting a war every time a British subject is murdered in a foreign country. Well, let me put a few facts before you. The Przimians are a quiet, peace-loving, industrious people.

A Voice : We've heard all that before.

P. Minister : You may have heard it before, but that doesn't make it the less true and the less important. The Przimians, I repeat, are a progressive, peace-loving, industrious people. That is a *fact*. You can go and see for yourselves. The Lorians are a wild predatory barbarous people. Now consider ; these peoples live side by side. What happens ? The barbarian, as barbarians do, meditates a surprise attack on his civilised and unprepared neighbour—a dastardly unprovoked attack on an unarmed foe.

A Voice : Not unprovoked. It was to get back the land——

P. Minister (very sharply) : Let me answer that. That has been said often enough. Let me answer it once for all. The suggestion is made that the territory gained by the Przimians from the Lorians in the war fifty years ago was snatched from them, stolen from them, by foul means. Let me remind you, gentlemen, that all the Great Powers of Europe—all the Great Powers of Europe—including that of which you have the honour to be citizens, were party to that settlement. What does that mean ? It means that at this moment we are looking on at a small power being crippled,

maimed, perhaps destroyed in an endeavour to defend a treaty of which we ourselves are guarantors !

He pauses just long enough to let his effect go home and then continues in a softer tone.

But it is not that to which I wish to draw your attention now. A barbarous power plans an absolutely unprovoked attack upon a peaceful neighbour . . . let me put it to you. A brave young English girl, lured by a scoundrel belonging to this race, is present when a number of his companions are plotting together, and thus becomes possessed of important information concerning their machinations. We can well imagine the scene ! They require her to swear that she will not divulge their plans. She refuses. They once more require her. Again she refuses, standing firm as it is the tradition of her race to do. They threaten her with death. Still she refuses. Thereupon, in cold blood, in a room like this, they pierce her young body through and through with bullets. Gentlemen, I ask you, is it necessarily a capitalist conspirator who refuses to sit by with complete equanimity and see such things done ? . . . Now, gentlemen, I do not

want to keep you longer, and that brings me to my last point. Mr. Grange referred to a capitalist conspiracy. He suggested that the capitalist saw with dismay the undertakings in which he had invested his money being destroyed by a ruthless enemy. Well, let us not attempt to hide it, he does. But is he wrong? And is it he alone that should look upon it with dismay? . . . I assure you, gentlemen, it is a short-sighted leader of labour who can see without apprehension one of our best customers destroyed by a nation who buy little or nothing from us and have little or nothing to give. If this kind of thing goes on, gentlemen, there can be but one result—unemployment.

You have come here to-day to protest against any effective action by this country to prevent the present destruction going on in Przimia. Let my final word to you be a reminder that if your protest has the success you presumably hope it will have, it will inevitably mean a spell of serious unemployment; and that it therefore behoves you to consider very carefully the measures which you propose to take to counter this misfortune which you will have been instrumental in bringing about. . . . I thank you, gentlemen.

THE RUMOUR

The PRIME MINISTER sits down. MR. GRANGE rises.

Grange : Mr. Prime Minister, without saying that we agree with the views you have put forward to-day, I am sure I am expressing the views of myself and my colleagues in thanking you for the very courteous way in which you have received this deputation.

Gruff "Hear, hears!"

The deputation, whispering among themselves, take their hats and coats, etc., and depart, those who know the PRIME MINISTER saying farewell to him, particularly MR. GRANGE, who shakes him warmly by the hand. There is a pause. The PRIME MINISTER gets up, stretches himself with the air of one who has accomplished a notable task, and walks meditatively across the room and back again.

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE II

Curtain drops, leaving a space in front representing the newsboy's beat. Enter the newsboy from the left, shouting his news in the usual way. He now has placards bearing the legends, "Sir G. Darnell on Britain's honour"; and "More Lorian Trickery." The newsboy is shouting "'Orian Agent at Downing Street." When he has reached the centre of the stage, enter from the right MR. JONES and MR. SMITH in the usual way. MR. JONES buys a paper from the newsboy, who passes on and disappears to the right, while SMITH sets his bag on the ground and gets out his pipe.

Jones: H'm! Lorian agent at Downing Street. Damn good hiding is what they want, and I hope they get it. I mean, if tribes like that aren't put down, as I said to the wife this morning, there's not a woman in the world that's safe. . . . I mean, as I was saying, if it was a question of

wealth, or trade, I wouldn't stand for it. I know too much about things like that to have any faith in them. I know too much of what's gone on behind the scenes in previous times. If it was a question of putting money into millionaires' pockets, or imperial prestige, or any of that, I'm a plain man, and you can't do me that way. But here's a plain case of the honour of Britain, as it seems to me. Did you read about that man that walked into Darnell's office——

Smith : Yes. I saw about that. A man in our office says he knows the man.

Jones (lowering his voice) : Well, I only hope we stand no nonsense, but this Socialist crowd, that's where it is . . . they're always the trouble.

Smith : Ah, you're right there.

Jones (more briskly) : You've heard of this corps of volunteers they're getting up in the city—Lena Jackson's Own, they call it. My boy's one of them. All the lads in his office are joining. The firm are giving them special facilities.

Smith : Ah—they've made quite a feature of it in the city, I hear.

Jones : I think it's quite a good scheme myself. The Lena's Own they call it. Of course, I don't suppose it'll come to anything. . . . In any case, I don't suppose the fighting

would be so bad, against tribes like that, but you never know what fevers and things like that you may come across in those outlandish parts.

Smith (as they move on) : Yes. I expect you're right there. . . . In our office there's a man. . .

Exeunt. Enter newsboy as before from right. He crosses the stage still shouting, and goes out to the left.

ACT III

SCENE III

A month later.

The whole stage bare, as representing a quay. Along the left-hand side is a stout rope, restraining a crowd of relatives seeing off embarking troops. To the right, out of sight, is a troopship. Almost the only article on the stage is an immense gangway, starting on the ground and leading to a point high up on the great vessel. The background is suggestive of the wide, untidy, and yet picturesque, and in some lights, beautiful expanses of a harbour.

As the curtain rises, the people are cheering or shouting, and somewhere close by a band is playing martial airs. An unending stream of khaki-clad soldiers, heavily laden, stumble their way clumsily up the gangway and disappear, looking back on their relatives in the crowd, if they have any, and sometimes waving in a self-conscious way. Two or three sentries guard the rope and prevent the crowd from advancing

beyond it. The noise of cranes working adds to the general din.

Among the crowd can be descried MR. JONES with his wife. The wife tries to make herself heard to one of the soldiers. Unable to, she ducks under the rope and runs up nearer the vessel's side. MR. JONES gets much excited, and shouts at her to come back. A quay official shepherds her back again. MR. JONES contents himself with smiling and waving his handkerchief; he still carries his black bag (containing sandwiches). He is angry with his wife on her return. . . .

All this is in dumb show, inasmuch as the generalised noise is so great that no actual words of any one individual are audible. This generalised noise—the band, the cranes, the hooters, the shouting of orders from the bridge, the shouting of men working the gangway, etc.—must dominate the whole scene, so as to put any individual action, however obvious, into the background.

On this din still continuing at full pressure descends a slow

ACT IV

SCENE I

A room in the palace of the Chancellor in Przimiprzak. At the back are large French windows opening on a balcony overlooking the main square of the town. The time is three months after the last scene. A conference is in progress with regard to the terms of peace to be dictated to the Lorians. Needless to say, no representative of the Lorians is present. The principals are LA RUBIA, representing Przimia, in the middle ; MOODIE, representing Britain, to his right ; and M. RAFFANEL representing France to his left.

The principals sit at a heavy table, with groups of advisers, experts, secretaries, etc., behind them. Towards one side behind the table is a large-scale map of Przimia and Loria on a stand such as appeared in the Prologue and Act I., Sc. I. An additional main boundary between Loria and Przimia

has been added ; it represents the proposed new boundary, and leaves a very attenuated and somewhat dismembered Loria.

The curtain rises upon a tableau. The principals have risen from their seats, and are grasping hands ; that is to say, LA RUBIA stands in the middle looking a little embarrassed, while MOODIE grasps his right hand and RAFFANEL his left. A large document lies on the table in front of him, predominating by its size over the litter of other papers. Similar congratulatory postures are evident among the subordinates in the background, and a general buzz of congratulation as at some important and splendid event is audible. After a moment the principals sit down and busy themselves with their papers, LA RUBIA gives the big document to a subordinate who hurries away with it, and the buzz dies away into silence. M. RAFFANEL rises.

Raffanel (in a solemn voice) : Gentlemen, before I refer to the work of the Boundary Commission, I cannot help saying how deeply I personally feel about the Agreement which was ratified a few moments ago, by which we are pledged on behalf of our respective governments to prosecute

our business here as one, with one desire in our hearts—the good of all—and not as three, each with a different point of view and divergent interests. . . . It is a solemn thought, gentlemen, that it has been reserved for us to inaugurate a new era. Let us look to it that we do not betray the trust that fate has placed in our hands. . . .

Applause, especially from the British and French.

I now come to the Report of the Boundary Commission of which I had the honour to be chairman. I venture to think, gentlemen, that both in its composition and in its recommendations that commission has been not unworthy of the new spirit to which I referred a moment ago. (*More slowly*): The Commissioners, gentlemen, determined, if possible, to discover an abstract principle of justice between the contending parties, and to apply that principle with ruthless scrupulousness ; and in that endeavour, gentlemen, I am proud to say that they have succeeded.

Applause from the British and French.

Now let me come to the concrete proposals. The

abstract principle which has guided the Commissioners has been *the respective needs and requirements of the two belligerent powers*. There could be no fairer principle than that. Now as to the application of that principle. The report points out that whereas the Przimians are a progressive people with an aptitude for the development of the territory over which they have control, the Lorians possess no such aptitude. If the principle of respective needs, therefore, is followed, it means that all territory giving scope and opportunity for development should go to the Przimians, while that which does not possess this quality should go to the Lorians. The map here shows the practical application of such a scheme. Thus the Przimians will gain this valley where there is much room for development—coal, iron, and so on ; while this mountainous region will remain in the hands of the Lorians, and they would gain this tract which has hitherto been in the hands of the Przimians. Again here we have the silver mines and oil wells of Clamnestra ; these the Commissioners recommend should in future belong to Przimia, and the copper mines and lignite deposits the same. On the other hand this mountainous region and the tract covered by the nitrate

deposits, it is suggested, might be left to the Lorians, with the proviso that the working and product of the nitrate deposits should be under foreign control ; while certain stretches here and here, and here, where there is no room for development, should be ceded by the Przimians and belong in future to the Lorians.

He indicates an unfertile tract away in the corner of Przimia far from the rest of the Lorian territory.

La Rubia (leaping up in excitement, re-echoed by his subordinates behind him): Gentlemen. I should like to say at once that I refuse to consent to the findings of the Boundary Commission, if, as appears to be the case . . .

His words become inaudible in a general turmoil that suddenly bursts forth.

Raffanel (with great dignity): Gentlemen, let me remind you that we are engaged upon important matters, matters affecting the destiny of mankind, and I do suggest for your consideration, that they cannot be conducted with such unseemly heat.

Every one suddenly grows quiet.

La Rubia : I quite agree with you, sir. But may I say, nevertheless, that this document contains certain recommendations that I cannot for one moment accede to. After all this was our war, fought over our country, and in which we had the victory. And yet the suggestion is made that we, the victors, should give up, should yield some of our territory to the enemy who has made an absolutely unprovoked attack on us, and whom we have overcome. Przimian men and their families are to find themselves deprived of their possessions, and when they ask why, the answer is because of their *victory* over the Lorians. Men who have fought for their country are to be required to——

Raffanel (with great dignity) : I agree with the first two parts of your penultimate statement, sir, but not with the final one. I agree that this matter began as your war, and was fought in your country. But as to your having the victory, I can hardly assent to *that*. Let me remind you of the position of affairs when the powers that Mr. Moodie and myself have the honour to represent intervened. There is no question that but for the intervention of France and Great

Britain there would be no state of Przimia to-day. As it is, consider what we have done for you. In addition to what you gained fifty years ago, a large and valuable tract of territory is to be added, which you have never before possessed. And by the amount that you have gained, your nearest and most dangerous enemy has lost. We, sir, have put the Lorian in a position from which they can never rise to menace you again. Is this nothing, sir, that you speak so slightly of us? I am surprised and pained, M. La Rubia, at the attitude you adopt, and if I may say so, it seems to me hardly consonant with the spirit of that agreement, whose solemn signature opened our proceedings to-day, or with the spirit in which this document that you speak so slightly of has been conceived. The abstract principle of justice recommended by the Commissioners gives you all the valuable territory while leaving your foe merely that which is valueless, but apparently that is not sufficient for you and you want——

La Rubia : It is not a question of that, sir. It is a question of principle. That the victor should cede territory to the vanquished is a monstrous idea which I cannot tolerate for one moment.

Raffanel : It is not a question of cession. It

is a question of exchanging a valueless piece of land for an extremely valuable one.

La Rubia : And why should we exchange and barter with our vanquished foe ? Is it not for us to dictate ?

Raffanel (*shrugging his shoulders*) : It is easy to give up that which is worth nothing.

La Rubia : You, M. Raffanel, look upon Przimia as your Government does, as your financiers do—as a collection of mines and factories, from which money can be derived. To us it is our land, our country. In this “*valueless*” territory, as you say, Przimian people have their homes, have been born and bred. They are attached to it. To them it is not valueless. Its loss to them would be irreparable. I tell you frankly, I could not face my people with such a proposition as that. I could not do it. I refuse to do it.

He sits down abruptly. M. RAFFANEL remains standing, and after a moment goes on.

Raffanel : Before this unhappy interruption, gentlemen, I had given you the gist of the Report of my Commission. If I may express my opinion once again, I believe the recommendations contained therein represent, so far as justice,

fairness, and generosity are concerned, an achievement without parallel in the history of mankind. And I can only hope that the representatives of Przimia will eventually come to appreciate that a crown of moral and spiritual glory is a grander thing than mere material possessions ; and that to provide a moral example to mankind nobler than to gain forcible empire over the whole world !

He sits down amid applause. MR. MOODIE
rises.

Moodie : It now falls to me, gentlemen, to speak on the Report of the Reparations Commission, but before doing so, like my colleague M. Raffanel, I cannot refrain from making some reference to the epoch-making agreement which was signed at the outset of our labours this morning. Like M. Raffanel, I am profoundly conscious of the opportunity which is being offered to us here to set an example to mankind, and I cannot but think that one decision to which we have come is a proof that at any rate two of the parties concerned in these negotiations are not unmindful of their privilege—I refer to the decision to require no indemnity from the enemy. The payment of an indemnity, gentlemen, is

the only way in which it would have been possible for the two great powers here represented to gain anything from this war. The decision to require no indemnity therefore means that they will gain nothing. Let me note that in order that I may freely and frankly say that I am glad of it. The two great powers interested entered this war, gentlemen, in the desire to defend a small nation against a dastardly attack that had been made upon it. They did not enter it for what they could get.

Applause from the French and British.

And the proof, the complete proof of it, is that they are going to get nothing ; and standing here as spokesman of one of them, I solemnly declare, with full knowledge of my responsibility, that I welcome such a settlement, and am glad of it.

Great applause from the British and French.

Now as regards the question of reparations. It has been agreed by a majority of the Commission that the Przimian Government should

be relieved of this matter, and that it should be dealt with by the two great powers concerned. The reason for this decision, I think, needs a little explanation. The Lorians, gentlemen, are not a people from whom any direct payments of any kind can be expected. They are too backward. Now if this is the case, the only method of obtaining reparation from them will be the direct one of requiring them to build up with their own hands, so to speak, what they have broken down. This will be a long and troublesome business, and as the districts overrun by the Lorians in the early stages of this war were the large industrial areas, and the bulk of the property destroyed was in the hands of either British or French owners, it was considered that it could be done more easily by direct negotiation between these powers and the Lorians, than through an intermediary. .

La Rubia (with rising heat) : And what of the land on which these things will be built? Has it nothing to do with the Przimians? What of the houses in which the workpeople live, do they not belong to us? . . .

“*Hear ! hear !*” and applause from behind him.

Moodie (coldly) : Many of them, as a matter of fact, do not. A majority of the Commission

· *Cries of "The British," "Foreigners," etc.*

have therefore recommended that a permanent board should be set up—upon which, of course, Przimia will be represented—let there be no mistake about that. It is not suggested Przimia should not be represented.

Cries of "I should think not!" "How kind!" "On our land!" "Ridiculous!"

This board will be the governing body to a secretariat who will conduct the negotiations with the Lorian Government as regards the reconstruction of the devastated areas——

Læ Rubia (rising in heat) : Gentlemen, I refuse point-blank to countenance such a scheme.

Raffanel (with dignity) : Calm yourself, M. La Rubia.

La Rubia : I will not calm myself till I have said what is in my mind. You think I do not see it, but I do, . . . You come here as you have always come here, purporting to represent your Governments, whereas you are really

financiers and merchants. Do you think I do not see your scheme. The Lorians are a beaten enemy, they can do nothing, so you intend to sweat them, and make them into slaves to work for you for nothing.

Raffanel (coldly): To re-build your country, M. La Rubia.

La Rubia: To re-build your factories. You have used our country in the past, gentlemen, for the purpose of putting up factories from which you may reap the gain. And you have had to man those factories to a considerable extent with our people, though you have done all you can to introduce cheap Lorian labour in their place. We have not forgotten that, gentlemen, though you may imagine we have. You have had to pay our people a decent wage. That is what you have not been able to bear. Now you think you see an opportunity to be rid of us altogether, by using a beaten enemy, a race of slaves, to build your factories and afterwards to work in them for you. When that comes to pass, where, I should like to know, will the Przimians be? It is not you, M. Raffanel, or you, Mr. Moodie, but your advisers who have put you on to this—your so-called financial and commercial experts, who are nothing more than merchants and dealers

and do not understand how one must act in matters of state ; but hold you in the hollow of their hands ! I protest emphatically against these suggestions here and now. I protest in the name of Przimia. We shall never allow them.

The excitement communicates itself to those in the background and begins to produce animosities which gradually swell.

Moodie : This is the second time that the representatives of Przimia have, if I may give my personal opinion, behaved in an uncalled-for manner. Gentlemen, I would ask you not to be so hasty, and a little more seemly. I would ask M. La Rubia what alternatives there are to the course we propose ? . . . The only alternative—and the one which perhaps M. La Rubia hopes for, is that we should find fresh stocks of capital wherewith to pay high wages to Przimian work-people to re-build our destroyed plant and factories. If that be what M. La Rubia wants, let me tell him we cannot do it ; we cannot afford it. We have poured money into Przimia once. We cannot do it a second time.

Rising uproar, coming to a small crisis at this point.

Raffanel (always dignified and polite) : I do not think that that is what M. La Rubia wants. I think he sees his opportunity to be rid of us. He is a clever, an astute man. He has got us to win this war for him. Now he wants to be rid of us. He hopes that we shall not be able to rebuild our factories, but that *he* will be able to do so, by means of the stores of wealth that we have won for him. (*Vaguely sorrowful.*) It is, I must confess, to me a surprising move. After all that Przimia owes us in the way of development, social amenities, after all the wealth that has been poured into their country——

A voice : “ *And out of it.* ”

La Rubia (rising, fiercely) : Gentlemen, I will not sit here longer and listen to these calumnies. Is it nothing, gentlemen, to have large portions of the territory which is supposed to belong to one covered with industrial plant and works, owned by foreigners, manned by foreigners, manned by our former enemies, who will thus inevitably enter into the same labour market with

our own people and competing with them lower their standards. Gentlemen, sooner than that I would sacrifice——

During this the excitement and animosity among the subordinates has been growing. At the same time a rising tide of excitement has been audible from outside, people collecting with bands and banners, and a general uproar of gaiety taking place. At this point deafening hurrahs are set up, cries of victory, and demands for speeches. LA RUBIA specially is called for. After hesitating a little, unable to speak or hear himself owing to the din inside and outside the room, and some consultation with his secretaries, he decides to address the mob, and goes out on the balcony. His appearance is greeted with frantic applause, followed after some difficulty by dead silence. Then LA RUBIA speaks.

(In a stentorian voice, with much gesture) : Friends—friends and brothers ! My heart to-day is full. . . . You will understand how difficult it is for me to address you.

. . . Roars of applause.

You have called for me, but it is not to me, except as your spokesman, your mouth-piece,

that you should look. It was not I, but yourselves who have won the triumph that we celebrate to-day. Friends, many a time as I watched you, I marvelled and said to myself, are these really merely human beings that bear themselves thus in adversity? Are they not rather gods and goddesses descended from heaven? And then the secret, the explanation came to me. The cause, friends, the sacredness of the cause! Never before have men and women borne themselves as you have done, but never before have they had such a cause. This war was not like most wars fought with hatred for the sake of gain. This was a holy war, fought by a people in righteous indignation——

Words lost amid roars of applause.

Yes—and the whole world realised this—realised that the issue at stake was something much greater than any mere territorial or economic interest. That, friends, is why we were joined in our sacred enterprise by our noble and disinterested allies, Great Britain and France!

Great applause.

. . .

. . . because they realised that were we overcome, the whole fabric of civilisation would be

threatened, and that the universe would be imperilled !

More applause.

But now, friends, the clouds have rolled away. Steadfastness, the holy cause, the consciousness of right, have won the day. (*In a subdued voice*) : Friends, forgive me if I say that I do not mean this in any other than a literal sense. Right always triumphs in the end, and to-day we have proved it. It is not generalship, friends, it is not armies, it is not guns, that win wars. It is the consciousness of *right* !

Immense applause.

Well, now the sun shines once more. Let us show ourselves worthy of the victory God has given us. Let us be stern to our beaten enemy, but let us be just.

Cries of, "String them up !" "Burn them." "Down with them." "Treat them as they would have treated us," etc.

As this war has differed from all previous wars

in being a holy war, waged in a holy spirit, with holy steadfastness of purpose, so let our settlement be holy, just. Stern let us be, but just.

A voice : “ Come along, don’t be weak ! ”

La Rubia : I am not going to be weak !

A Voice : What’s the indemnity going to be ?

La Rubia : I am coming to that ! We shall make the enemy pay . . . every farthing she is able ! Who, friends, can say what she has cost this agonised people ! She shall pay, friends, she shall pay to the uttermost ! . . . Not in the spirit of revenge do I say this, but in the spirit of stern, strong, even, preventive justice !

A Voice : Squeeze her till you can hear the pips squeak !

Laughter.

La Rubia : Only one thing more, and I have done.

Cries of, “ No ! ” Go on.” “ Hurrah,” etc., and a squeak from a bassoon at which there is laughter.

I have spoken of the stern justice of our settlement.

Cries of "Give 'em hell," etc.

Friends, stern justice cannot emanate from a tribunal divided against itself. I have to announce that this morning we have sworn a solemn league and covenant with our noble allies, France and Great Britain, Great Britain and France, henceforth to go forward hand-in-hand, heart-to-heart, acting not as three with separate interests, but as one, and one only, with one single and solemn interest at heart—the welfare of the Universe!

Immense excitement, wild cheering, all kinds of noises, bands, banners, etc. M. LA RUBIA has to bow many times. Then suddenly he calls for silence and yells out—

Friends, three cheers for our noble allies!

Terrific excitement and calls for them. M. LA RUBIA invites them over, and the three men step out on the balcony amid a whirlwind of excitement, together with cries of "The General!" "The General!" LA RUBIA

turns round and says in an irritated manner to a subordinate—

Where's General Moberley ?

The subordinate rushes off, while the excitement continues. A moment later he comes back and says to LA RUBIA, "He was asleep, but he's coming." A moment later enter the General in British General's uniform, incongruous in slippers hastily put on. He is guided over to the window, where his appearance is greeted with further excitement. The climax comes when LA RUBIA embraces the other three and kisses them violently on the cheeks. This disconcerts the General who wipes his face carefully afterwards.

Finally they come in and the windows are shut, but the excitement outside can still be heard faintly. They return to their places. The General disappears.

Raffanel (rather coldly): Well, perhaps we might return to our affairs.

La Rubia (jumping up violently): Certainly, gentlemen. And as I was saying, I must dissent entirely from the views put forward in the Report

of the Reparation Commission. I refuse for one moment to countenance them. If I were to——

At this moment one of the uniformed officials enters and approaches LA RUBIA, whispering in his ear. He consults with the other two principals, and immediately there is a herding of all subordinates to one side, while a photographer with an immense camera and a retinue of assistants enter. The three great men come forward, but the photographer intimates his desire first to show the world what they are like at work. They accordingly sit in their places and look very important and business-like. There is a pause while the photographer adjusts his camera. Presently he motions to his sitters. Each consciously or subconsciously assumes the kind of attitude he thinks the world would expect from him. As the photographer makes his exposure——

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE II

The curtain descends on the newsboy's beat. Enter newsboy from left with placards bearing the legends: "Complete Agreement among Powers"; "Epoch-Making Compact Signed," and shouting, "Honour for General Moberley." As he arrives at the centre of the stage, enter MR. JONES and MR. SMITH from the right. MR. JONES, as usual, buys a paper and MR. SMITH gets out his pipe.

Jones (looking at the paper): "Complete agreement"—well, that's good. But I shouldn't think it would be very hard in this case. It's an absolute clear case of unprovoked aggression, absolutely clear. I mean there's no room for two opinions, however you look at it.

Smith: No. You're right there. A man in our office——

Jones: All I hope is they don't let 'em off too easily. I mean, I don't believe in revenge

myself, but you must make certain that this kind of thing won't happen again, no matter what measures you have to take. If I was there, I'd deal very firmly with them, you may take it from me. I wouldn't stand any nonsense. . . . By Jove, Honour for Moberley—did you know that? They're going to make him a Lord.

Smith (sucking at his pipe): Are they indeed?

Jones: Well, by Jove, I'm glad, for he's deserved it, if ever any one did. Every inch a soldier he is. My boy thinks no end of him. . . . I'm expecting my boy home before the end of the month, you know—and they've kept his place open for him.

Smith: Yes—so you said.

Jones (moving underneath the light of the lamp-post, and turning away): Yes. . . . Well, it's all over now, and I tell you I'm not sorry. It's not the fighting I mind, but you never know what fevers. . . .

His voice dies away. He stands staring at the paper. Pause.

Smith: No. You're right there.

Further pause. JONES still stares at the

paper. SMITH notices the silence, and glances at JONES.

(After a moment embarrassed): Well . . . what? . . .

He comes up to him, and looks at the paper over his shoulder. After a moment, having realised what has happened, he steps back and searches in his mind for something to say. JONES remains as before. Presently SMITH goes up to JONES, and, unable to find any words, touches him on the shoulder to express sympathy. Then he waits, considering if he can be of any use, or if JONES may speak. As JONES remains exactly as before, he presently turns and treads away out to the left, almost on tiptoe as though he feared to make any sound. Still JONES has not moved. His figure as he stands staring at the paper appears to have shrunk and become bent. Pause.

SLOW CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE III

The same scene exactly as Act III., Scene III. The same crowd and high gangway. The same band playing the same tune and the same shouting, but the soldiers are de-barking and walking down instead of up the gangway. After a moment the last man comes off. A few commands are heard off, and gradually the crowd disappears, and the noise grows faint. The rope is loosened by an invisible means and falls on the ground.

• *Enter from the left a clergyman and MR. SMITH.*

Clergyman : Yes, I thought I'd run down. Mrs. Hall was coming to meet her son, and Mrs. Chamberlain and her two boys to meet their father, and some others. So we clubbed together to reserve a carriage. It's much more convenient that way, I always think. . . . (*Looking at his*

watch.) There's three-quarters of an hour till the train goes. I think we might get some tea.

They stand gazing over the water.

Yes—it was pleasant to see the reunions as the lads came off the vessel ; but it's sad to think of those reunions that might have been. . . . I'm sorry about young Jones, he was a promising lad . . . as indeed were many others.

Smith : Ay—you're right there. War's a sad business.

Clergyman : Yes—a sad business. . . . However, we must comfort ourselves with the thought that they fell in a noble and worthy cause, urged on by the chivalry that lies in every Englishman's heart. They were Lena Jackson's Own and they were a worthy sacrifice on the altar of her heroism. That, I think, is one thing that British mothers and wives should be thankful for ; Britain does not soil her honour in an unworthy cause. When she enters the lists it is on the side of right, and her sons fall defending the good. . . .

Smith (after a moment) : The firms in the City have been very good over this.

Clergyman : So I understand. A fund has

been started, of which Sir Robert Mortimer is chairman, I believe, for the relief of distress among dependents of the dead. . . . Yes, oh, yes—I always think the Englishman comes well out of such things. He's never mean or niggardly.

Smith : No. You're right there.

Clergyman (looking at his watch) : Dear me, we ought to go. . . . By the way, I'm delivering a series of lectures on Thursday evenings at eight o'clock in the Parish Hall on this campaign, and why it was inevitable. Perhaps you would care to come. . . . Come in by the side door. . . . Quite a number of my parishioners have had sons or brothers among the fallen, and I think it is well they should realise that it is not in vain they have given their dear ones. The poor people don't read, you know, or if they do they don't understand. . . . (*Briskly*) : Well now, perhaps we might see if we can get some tea. I noticed a little shop as we came along where the buns looked fresh.

They move away and disappear on the right.
Pause. The light on the headland still winks.

EPILOGUE

The same scene as the Prologue. WALTER, LUKE, NED, KITTY, RUBY sit round the fire.

As the curtain rises, there is a burst of laughter, and they all drink.

Ruby (excited): Oh, Walter, I think that's lovely! Where did you get it? How does it go? There was——?

Walter: “There was a young fellow called
Jimmy,
Dressed himself in his young sister's
pinny,
Scrubbed his face a bit cleaner,
Gave out he was Lena,
And kissed all the boys out in
Shimmy!”

Ruby: Oh, I think that's great. “There was a young man called Jimmy, who——” Oh, I think that lovely. Don't you think that's lovely, Kitty?

Kitty: Yes. Great.

Ruby : Oh, I think that's lovely ! There was a young—— How does it go again, Walter ?

Ned : Well, now, as I was saying——

Ruby : Oh, Walter, you must tell us again ! How does it go ?

Walter (rudely) : Oh, shut up, will you. You've damn well got to keep out of the way now, we're talking business.

RUBY appears to be used to this kind of address, and subsides, rather like a snubbed child, but continues to giggle. KITTY listens to the men.

Ned : Well, as I was saying, what we've got to do now is to take stock of our position. It's not our business to squeal and let go. If the situation's got out of hand a bit, it's our business to control it again as soon as we can, and the first step is to take stock of our assets, so to speak. In other words, how do we stand now as compared to before this war ? Well, it's true that up to now we've lost a considerable amount——

Ruby (suddenly, with surprise) : Lost ? D'you mean to say you've lost over this war ?

Walter : Lost ? I should think we have.

Ruby : You have ? But you never told me. My God, but this is serious ! How much have you lost ?

Walter : Well, we've had our whole damned place smashed up. That's loss, isn't it ?

Ruby : Yes, but you must get compensation for that. Of course you must.

Walter : Not a penny !

Ruby : Oh, but you must. I don't think that's right.

Kitty (laughing) : Ruby quite annoyed !

Ruby : Well, I don't. After all, I have to live off what he gets, and if people cheat him, it's taking it off me. No, you think again, Walter. I'm damned if I'll sit down under that. That's not right !

RUBY looks angry and annoyed, and stops giggling and sits up very stiff.

Awkward pause.

Ned (going on presently) : Well, that's what we've lost. . . . But look what we've gained. Nothing less than the control of the whole new area that's been taken from the Lorians.. And then, again, owing to those outsiders scuttling like rabbits to sell out when the scare came, and to our being ready for them, we've got rid

of them and gained practically a hundred per cent. interest in all the undertakings for practically nothing, just at the moment when the possibilities are greater than ever before ! Don't talk to me about loss ! I don't worry about things like that, they're too small. It's the large blocks of control that really count if you've the sense to work and wait. . . . I tell you this war has turned out one of the best ventures I ever had anything to do with : and, I'm inclined to think, most wars of the kind would. They set up a strain that washes away the weaker people and leaves only the stronger ones, so that control gets further concentrated and general organisation easier.

Walter : Yes, old son, but it depends who wins the war. What if the Lorians had won ?

Ruby : Yes—that's what I say. My God, to think what would have happened if those savage brutes had won ! There wouldn't have been a woman or child safe in the world.

Ned : Yes . . . but the right side always wins—or always will in future, because the day has gone by when we can afford to leave these things to chance. Old General Moberley made every mistake, so I'm told, that any one could make. Only it didn't matter—except that a lot

more men were killed than need have been. . . . In a war—as in everything else nowadays—a rocky financial concern goes to pieces. The armament people are like us all ; they're not going to give credit to a shaky concern, and so it goes to the wall. So the right side's bound to win. . . . Old Moberley, I dare say, could be guaranteed to lose any war, except against unarmed men, he couldn't very well do that. . . . You see, the Lorian credits with the armament people ran out, and they couldn't get any more ammunition—that's what finished them. (*He rises.*) I know, because *it was on my advice that the armament people acted in the matter.* . . . I'm going to bed. Good-night.

He disappears into the gloom. There is silence.

Ruby (as the curtain begins to descend): Ned's a funny old card, isn't he?

The curtain completes its descent.

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